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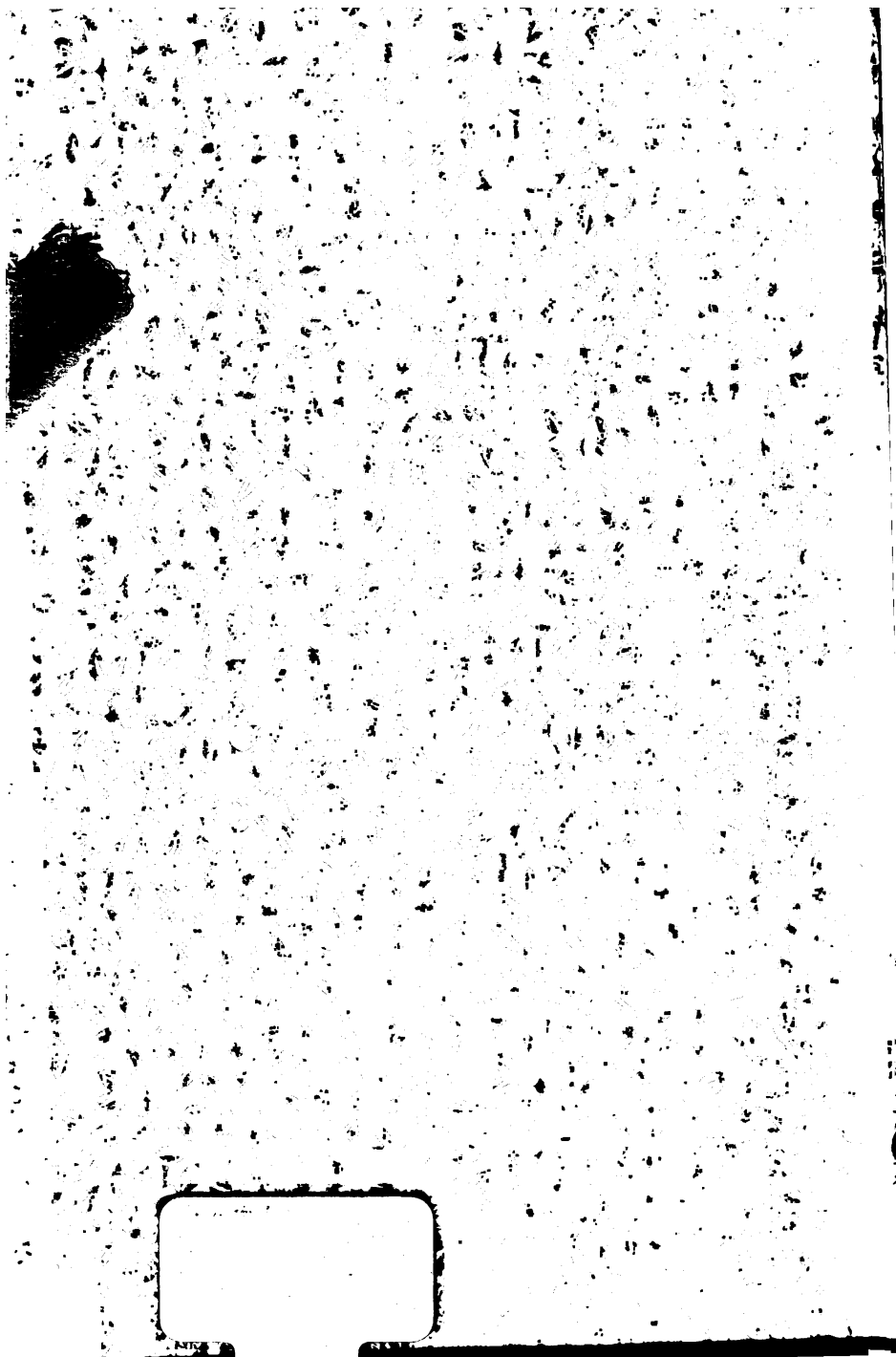
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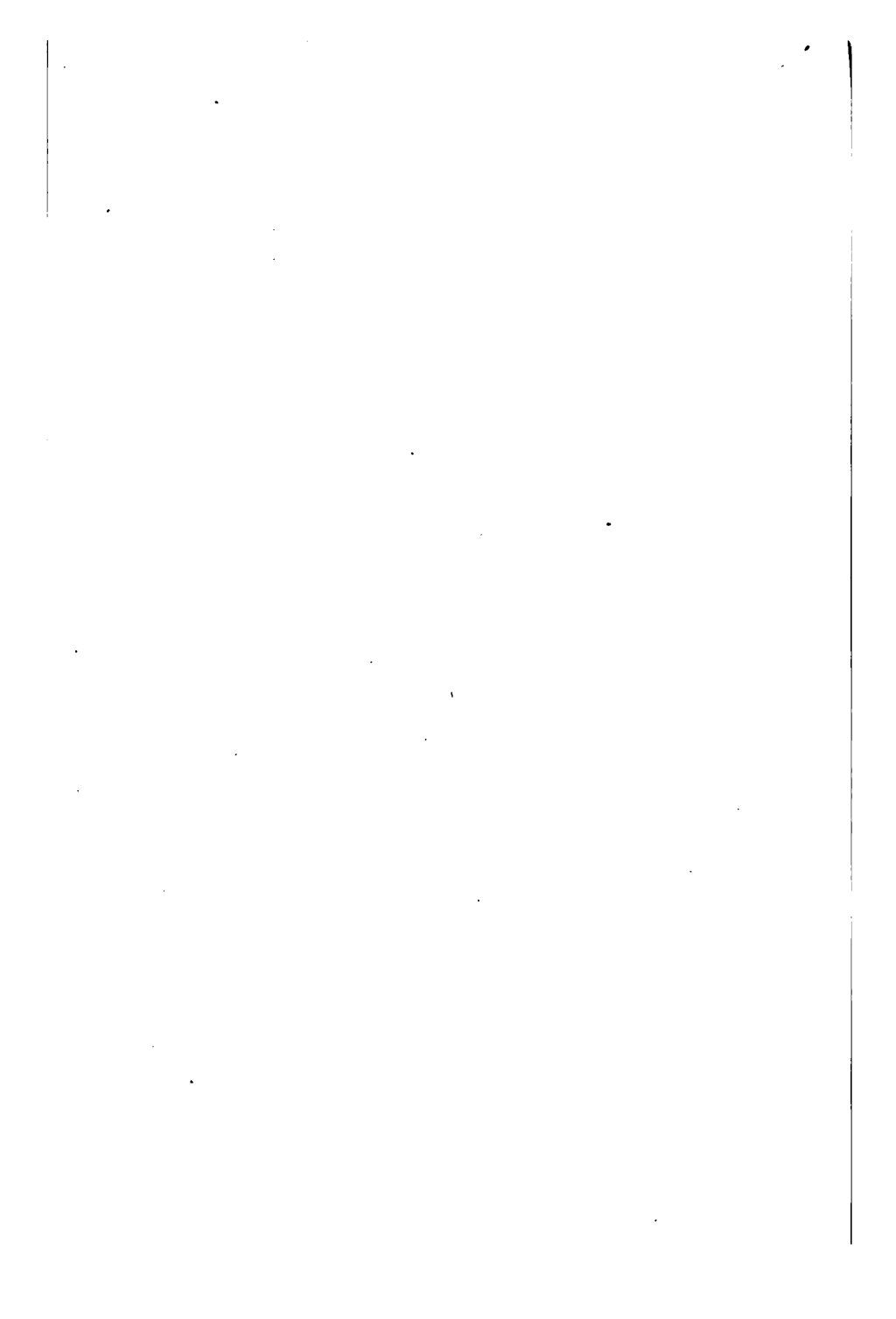






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THE
PRINCE OF WALES'S
GARDEN-PARTY

AND OTHER STORIES

By MRS. J. H. RIDDELL

AUTHOR OF "GEORGE GEITH OF FEN COURT," "THE MYSTERY IN
PALACE GARDENS," "THE SENIOR PARTNER," ETC.



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THE PRINCE OF WALES'S GARDEN-PARTY.

CHAPTER I.

16 IF Southbay had a fault—a suggestion which Southbay would have scouted—it was a tendency to consider itself the universe. The inhabitants, worthy people most of them, were so much in the habit of thinking their own concerns and the concerns of their neighbours affairs of paramount importance, that, if a great European war had broken out, they would not have considered it of one half so much public interest as the burning of Farmer Beanstalk's ricks, or the defalcations of the local tax-gatherer. The death of the parish-clerk produced a more profound impression amongst all ranks and classes than that of the Emperor Napoleon; while the Crimean war was only thought worthy of a place in the annals of Southbay because one of the Squire's sons happened to be killed before Sebastopol.

"There is a marble in the church about it," said Southbay; and so summed up the campaign.

Never was there so self-contained a little town. In the season visitors came and went, took lodgings, paid sufficient sums of money to landladies and tradespeople; but Southbay took no notice of them, beyond putting down everything they required, in the way of eating, drinking, and clothing, at about double its worth, in their bills.

Southbay did nothing for the amusement of its guests. It had no bands, no regattas, no flower-shows, no promenades; it would not have even a barrel-organ, or a monkey clad in Highland costume, appear in its streets.

To visitors Southbay was austere, not to say repellent. Their money was acceptable, but themselves—no. Southbay did not like its sands to be dug over by strange children; it grudged the shells infant hands bore triumphantly inland. It had a general idea there must be something wrong about the homes of persons who left them each year to the mercy of charwomen and servants; and it viewed with distinct disfavour the dresses of those ladies who thought to pleasure Southbay by donning all their bravery, and appearing in church arrayed in silk attire, made in the

very latest fashion. The wars of politicians, the intrigues of statesmen, the triumphs achieved by art, the discoveries of explorers—all these things, which Southbay read about in its local papers, were merely regarded as parts of a play enacted for the pleasure of the little town.

If business or expediency took any of the Southbay folks up to London, themselves and all their neighbours imagined London must be excited by the circumstance. That London was able to get on without people from Southbay the inhabitants understood, after a fashion, just as they understood Jura and the Rhigi still remained standing, even though no tourist from amongst them chanced to be in Switzerland; but they felt the mountains, during such absence, must be lonely; and in like manner they had a conviction—none the less certain because silent—that without visitors from Southbay London must seem empty. The sense of personal importance was upon every one in Southbay; less because of that importance of individuality, which characterises even a gutter child, but because he or she belonged to Southbay.

It was something to have been born there, and to have had many ancestors born there likewise, for many previous generations; but it was also something for fresh comers to be

taken up by Southbay, figuratively given the freedom of that historical town, admitted to the ranks of fellowship, and treated almost upon an equality with those who had "lived there all their lives."

This was a work of time. Not rashly did Southbay vouchsafe other than a cold welcome to those who bought properties or took long leases of houses in its midst. Southbay said, and said rightly, that it knew nothing about strangers; and so it was tacitly understood that strangers were there to be treated as the English law practically treats those it is supposed to consider innocent—as most pestilent criminals.

When a new man came to the pretty watering-place, there was no story concerning him that might not have hoped to gain credence.

If Southbay had heard he was a bigamist, a forger, a swindler, Southbay would have said, "Just what I thought."

As for birth, no man could be well born who had not Southbay blood in his veins. Over tea and supper tables genealogies were recited that would have astonished Sir Bernard Burke. Good, sound family-trees, growing in other pastures, were pronounced mushrooms. There was always some ancient dame, or shaky old gentleman, who knew stories to the dis-

paragement of Lord A.'s grandfather, or the Marchioness of B.'s mamma.

Voices were dropped and heads shaken, and such utterances as, "I could tell a tale about that family;" or, "There were good reasons why the last earl did not marry, only the less said concerning such matters the better; though it was stated on the best authority that the scandal concerning Lady ——" and so forth—all of which remarks were as so much wine to the inhabitants of Southbay, making glad their hearts within them, and showing more conclusively than the parson ever did, how dreadfully wicked the world was—that world from which, each Sunday audibly, and on most weekdays in its heart, Southbay prayed to be delivered.

For the world to Southbay seemed a very tangible thing. It meant all creation outside its own little circle—London, St. Petersburg, New York, and many other places mentioned in the geography-book.

The feeling which induced the Shetland minister to pray for his own country and the "adjacent islands" of Great Britain and Ireland, was rampant at Southbay. It was an ignorant little place—a hundred, two hundred, three hundred years behind the rest of the world in mental civilisation; just tolerating new

curates, treating doctors who took care of a practice as if they belonged to some strange and far-away order of creation; taking unkindly to wives introduced from a distance, and refusing altogether to believe in husbands from remote counties—say Middlesex, or Surrey, or Hertfordshire, or any other shire beyond the pale of that which boasted the fee-simple of Southbay.

For these and many other reasons Southbay had failed to greet with effusion the new agent who came to rule over the great Forrest estates. For some motive, unintelligible to outsiders, local wisdom decided Mr. Albyn, the son of the late agent, ought to have stepped into his father's shoes. That Mr. Albyn disliked country life, and was making a far greater success in London as a barrister than he could ever have hoped to do at Southbay, even as Mr. Forrest's representative, modified their opinion not in the least. Southbay had known him as a boy, and Southbay felt it could know him as a man.

On the contrary, the new agent was a total stranger to all the men, women, and children in the town. No one knew anything about him or his wife. He declined to live in the house Mr. Albyn had inhabited—a great staring square stone house on the eastern

road, commanding an uninterrupted view of shingle and of restless sea, and instead "took himself off," as Southbay indignantly expressed itself, to a "trumpery cottage" on the way to Southcliffe — a cottage which it was an insult put upon the Forrest property for Mr. Forrest's agent to live in.

"But what can be expected when a landlord deliberately builds himself a residence in a strange county, and actually talks of letting off some of his land, so that speculators may come and run up dreadful villa residences, and spoil the whole neighbourhood?"

That was what Southbay asked; and as, somehow, the new agent seemed to be an instrument in the hands of the infatuated landlord, it was not likely he, a stranger, an alien, an innovator, would be regarded with much favour.

And here it may as well be said the dreaded change has been wrought.

Southbay is not now a pretty little town, nestling down on the sea-shore under the shelter of soft green hills.

Capitalists, speculative builders, Conservative, Liberal, Independent, and Progress Societies, have found out the place and changed the very face of Nature itself.

No transformation-scene was ever more com-

plete. Where broom waved and gorse grew there are public baths and lecture-rooms, and a bazaar and a riding-school. Mr. Albyn's old house has been bought for an hotel, and just beyond it a pier has been thrown out, where steamers stop and bring hosts of visitors to this "favourite watering-place," *vide* the guide-books to Southbay. Two lines of railway have tunnelled under the hills, and come out of darksome caverns into their respective stations. New people jostle the old inhabitants, and a fresh cemetery has been started, to say nothing of water-works, gas-works, and a brewery.

There has been even a talk of trying the electric light along the "Old Parade;" but Southbay—the original Southbay—does not care. Its cup has long been full—electric or any other lights cannot matter to it now.

When the prospectus of the Pier Hotel Company (Limited) was issued, with Mr. John Albyn's name as one of the directors, Southbay figuratively turned its face to the wall, and gave up the ghost!

CHAPTER II.

A BROILING afternoon in the latter part of July—not a breath of wind stirring, the sea lying blue and still under the summer sun.

The clanging of church-bells; the voices of many children; wreaths and garlands hung about the houses and suspended across the street; a certain appearance of deadly liveliness about the town; the fact of all the inhabitants being dressed in gala or Sunday costume denoted that an uncommon event was stirring the sluggish pulse of Southbay.

Round and about the “Forrest Arms” a grateful smell of something very savoury pervaded the air. There was to be a dinner in a few hours’ time at that ancient hostelry, recently re-christened. It was quite a holiday. There had been service in the battered church with the old stone tower, where the bells were now pealing, and luncheon-parties given at the houses of several of the gentry. Menservants and maidservants wore wedding-favours, and all the Forrest tenantry had similar decorations. The proudest people relaxed, and had some pleasant word to say to their humbler neighbours; whilst the poor would have been

jubilant, save that their joy was tempered by an uncertainty as to whether the hundred pounds sent down by Mr. Forrest for their behoof was to be given to them in goods or money.

If in money——. But, however, that has nothing to do with this story.

Walking up the shady side of the High-street, Mr. Forde, the rector, encountered his parishioner, Miss Le Deene, walking in the shade likewise, but in the opposite direction.

“Whither away?” asked the clergyman, with that genial smile and gracious affability of manner which at a very early period of his rectorship had disarmed the antagonism and thawed the ice of Southbay.

“You will laugh when I tell you,” answered the lady thus addressed. “Seeing neither husband nor wife here, I had a fancy to walk over to Southcliffe.”

“Indeed!” said the rector, thoughtfully.

“It is strange that Mr. Forrest’s agent should absent himself on the occasion of the rejoicings on account of Mr. Forrest’s wedding,” continued Miss Le Deene.

“*He* is to be at the dinner this evening,” remarked the rector.

“Have you ever seen him?” asked the lady.

“Never,” was the reply. “When I called

he was out, and you know they do not attend church at Southbay."

"I know," groaned Miss Le Deene.

"Have *you* ever seen him?" asked Mr. Forde, retorting the lady's question of a moment before.

"No," she said, "but I have seen her, and, simply and truly, she is the loveliest creature I ever beheld."

"Really?"

"Really, Mr. Forde. I am a woman, and consequently do not profess to be a connoisseur of such matters; still, I have been here and there and everywhere in my time, and seen many beautiful faces, but not one like hers."

"Indeed!" said the clergyman again. "You have excited my curiosity. I must call again, and try to see her."

"She is not difficult of access," answered Miss Le Deene, "and if she is at home when you call she is sure to see you. She is not handsome, but she is lovely—though Southbay won't take to her; just the very sweetest woman you ever met."

And with that parting statement, which, indeed, might have been considered a slap in the face of Mrs. Rector, Miss Le Deene shook hands with her spiritual adviser, and

walked solitary up the hillside and over the cliffs.

A tall angular woman, who followed no fashion and adopted no party. Who, living in Southbay, contemned Southbay. Who, born in Southbay, was not quite of Southbay. Who had brought ways and thoughts into Southbay that Southbay deemed were foreign to its nature; and yet who, for all her travelling and reading and mixing with society, was as true and typical a Southbaian as any who had lived in the place from birth to burial.

The daughter of a bishop, the granddaughter of a judge—the judge born in Southbay, the bishop born in Southbay too (the little place had sent out many a noted man)—she returned after a long time, to cast in her lot with the descendants of her progenitors, while electing to do several things which the Southbaians viewed with suspicion.

Unto herself she was a rule, and unto her she permitted no man or woman to dictate.

She had tried various places of residence and various ways of life; but after all—after the ups and downs, the ins and outs—she came back to Southbay, as people whose position elsewhere was most uncertain had a habit of doing.

In Southbay she was to a certain extent a power. Southbay said, "Miss Le Deene had her notions about things," or her "special whims;" but Southbay did not controvert her notions or contradict her whims. No; not even when she visited the Arkleys, who had not responded to the patronage of Southbay.

That genial town only remarked, "Miss Le Deene perhaps is right; at all events she can do what we cannot."

Therefore Southbay, when once it found Mrs. Arkley from home, was content so to leave her, while Mrs. Arkley seemed more than content so to be left.

But Miss Le Deene was not content so to be left. She had taken a fancy to Mrs. Arkley. Whether her husband were king or kaiser, whether she had sprung from the people or were a scion of some ancient stock, signified not a pin to the bishop's daughter. That lady understood at first sight the wife of the new agent was a gentlewoman, and the loveliest woman she had ever beheld.

She was not handsome, or beautiful, or pretty. No sculptor would have craved to chisel her features. No artist would have entreated to portray a perfect face.

She had no beauty of the devil wherewith to craze the pen of a certain order of modern

novelists, but she was lovely—simply, wholly, entirely.

When you looked at her you could wish nothing more, you could suggest nothing less. You never paused to think whether her features were regular, her hair the rarest shade of brown, her figure of the best proportions; but when you saw her smile, heard her voice, felt the warm clasp of her hand, you knew it was just fair, honest, pure Susan Arkley, and thought her, with Miss Le Deene, a most lovely and perfect creature.

As her visitor drew near she was standing under a great beech-tree that grew in front of the cottage, with her year-old baby in her arms—a fair picture.

How tall? you ask. Well, that was a question no one who ever saw her thought of asking; but she scarcely reached the middle height; a slight, graceful creature, with hair of the warmest shade of brown, red almost when she was a toddling little mite, but which had mellowed into the brightest, sunniest, richest brown imaginable.

There was a little wave in it too, and it was drawn back from her forehead and rippled in soft curves above her ears, and was drawn together behind in a knot.

Hers was the clear creamy skin which

accompanies such hair, and she had the tender hazel eyes, shaded by long black lashes, sometimes wanting in that conjunction.

Sweetest eyes! innocent as a child's, and yet earnest with all a woman's depth of tenderness; eyes that could answer to another's mood, smile back smiles, melt into pity, weep tears of sympathy, look steadfastly out on life; eyes a man might well love to see in the face of his wife, his daughter, or his mother; and that if once you had beheld shining at you with the glamour of love or friendship in them, you would forget never again till all love and all friendship were forgotten too.

For the rest, what was there? A calm, white brow; cheeks never brilliant with colour, save when emotion tinted or excitement flushed them. If you had taken the delicate leaf of a blush rose and laid it against her cheek, the colour faintly mantling there would scarcely have outvied it. Her nose was small and straight, but belonged to no recognised order; and her mouth was frank, sweet, gracious.

If there were a firmness about the lower part of her face which spoke of a strength her eyes seemed to belie, it was softened down by the tenderness of her expression, shaded

off by the lovely curve of her lips, and the sweet dimples lying in transparent hiding for the first smile to discover and reveal.

A girl almost in appearance, and yet a woman who had left her teens behind her one summer birthday some seven years ago.

"I am all alone," she said, gaily coming forward over the greensward to meet Miss Le Deene — "all alone, except baby and Betty. Every one else is off to see the show; baby is too young and Betty too old to care for such vanities."

"But you, Mrs. Arkley—I was perfectly amazed not to meet you to-day. Without offence, I suppose I may say you are not too young—as you certainly are not too old—to enjoy a gala-day."

Mrs. Arkley laughed, as, with the gesture of one well accustomed to such pastime, she tossed up baby and held him high in the air, she looking at him with merry, upturned face, he crowing in the intensity of his delight.

"Forgive me," she said the next moment, with a deprecating smile, perceiving that Miss Le Deene failed to see how she had originated any amusing idea. "I could not help laughing at your notion that I was likely to be attracted by *fêtes* and festivals. These are for other folks—are not they, boy darling?

The fact is I have seen so many shows that I do not think I should fret if I never saw another. One evening I came home from a great party, and took off my finery, glass slippers and all, and do not feel as if I should ever care to walk into fairyland again, unless—unless an impossibility came to pass.”

“Were you so unhappy at that—that great party you speak of?” asked Miss Le Deene.

“Unhappy?” cried Mrs. Arkley. “O, dear, no! It was fairyland I passed through that day, and I found an enchanted prince there. I suppose it is the bells—the influence of the wedding—memory—something which makes me talk in this light-minded way. Pray come in—you must be so tired—and have some tea. Betty is making it.”

“Shall I not have the pleasure of seeing your husband?” asked Miss Le Deene, passing through a window opening to the ground, and wreathed in a green frame of tangled clematis and passion-flower and roses.

“I am afraid not,” Mrs. Arkley answered; but her tone was slower and her voice graver now, her visitor noticed. “He must go down to the tenants’ dinner, and I scarcely think he will come back home first.”

“Ahem! Something wrong here,” decided Miss Le Deene. “My lady’s pretty tongue does

not wag so fast or so glibly when she speaks of the real lord and master as it did when she talked of the fairy prince. That is why she does not care for shows, and why festivals and feasts are alike uninviting."

"Is your husband very shy, Mrs. Arkley?" enquired the judge's granddaughter, blandly and insinuatingly, as that functionary might have put a similar question from the bench.

"No, he is not shy," answered Mrs. Arkley, but she said the words thoughtfully, and half hid her face in baby's neck.

"Perhaps he is very proud?" suggested Miss Le Deene with a lightsome smile, intended to conceal the real artfulness of the enquiry.

"No, certainly not proud," said the young wife, dreamily, "though if any one ever had cause to be proud it is he;" and as she spoke a soft light came into her eyes, like a sweet effect of tearful sunshine.

"I have heard," remarked Miss Le Deene—"a little bird whispered the story about Southbay—that Captain Arkley has greatly distinguished himself."

Mrs. Arkley smiled.

"O, yes, indeed! More, far more than that; but he does not like me to speak about it. He won't talk of such things himself, or allow me to talk of them either."

"One can see who is master here," considered Miss Le Deene, who, unlike Sarah, had never called any man lord, with amazement, and who could not avoid feeling a pitying contempt for a woman who even professed to obey her husband; but she only said aloud, "The Victoria Cross was conferred upon him, was it not?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Arkley, with a wistful, far-away look, and a repressed sigh.

She was thinking, poor soul, it might sometimes be a decoration dearly bought, and that, reversing the usual order of things, not even such a crown could lighten the burden of a life-long cross.

At that moment a servant came in with tea. Never did interruption seem more welcome.

"Take baby," said the mother, and her voice was full of unshed tears, "and put him to sleep, please, Betty. Our little household seems quite demoralised to-day, Miss Le Deene; but then we have not a Mr. Forrest married every week."

"Do you know him personally?" asked Miss Le Deene.

"Intimately. He has been a dear friend of ours for years past."

"Indeed!" commented Miss Le Deene, feeling puzzled by the statement.

Though Mr. Forrest's father had risen "quite from the people," so the Southbay babble had it, still he had risen from the people of Southbay; and, spite of the fact that scarcely any one in the town was acquainted with him even by sight, the individual who possessed all the great Forrest properties, all the shore rights and mineral rights, and Heaven only knew how many other rights besides, seemed a great man even in the eyes of the bishop's daughter.

Miss Le Deene sipped her tea in silence. There was a certain dreaminess about the atmosphere of the pretty drawing-room, and Miss Le Deene felt meditative. She did not understand the Arkleys; did not comprehend any one choosing to live in a lonely cottage when a good house in Southbay was to be had for a song; could not see why Mr. and Mrs. Arkley persisted in refusing the invitations sent them for tea, dinner, a little evening; why Mrs. Arkley was seen so rarely in Southbay, and Captain Arkley, as one might say, never. Two whole months at Southcliffe, and stranger to Southbay than though they had lived hundreds of miles away, toiling across the hills on Sundays to Southchurch, and keeping themselves aloof, as if he were a duke and she a duchess.

Indeed, the Duchess of Landless had behaved herself very differently while taking the air and sea-baths at Southbay. Once, when overtaken by a thunderstorm, she sought refuge in widow Harting's cottage, where she seated herself quite affably, and gave the widow's little granddaughter a threepenny-piece when the shower passed over.

Miss Le Deene had heard some rumour of a severe wound Captain Arkley received when fighting; who was it—the Chinese, or the South Sea Islanders, or the Tartars, or some other people? It did not much signify to Southbay where the soldiers of England had fought or were fighting. At all events, she knew tidings to that effect had reached the little town. Perhaps it had touched his head or spoiled his temper.

A certain admiral of her acquaintance, who returned home short of a leg, grew simply unbearable while the wind was in the east; and she remembered a Waterloo veteran, of whom his relations said, whenever his overnight potations had been too deep and too strong, he always declared, "That bullet is troubling me again."

Perhaps Captain Arkley grew at times unbearable; perhaps, indeed, he was always unbearable, and preferred his own temper to

any other society. Miss Le Deene had met with two or three eccentric people, who, though sound of limb and harbouring no bullets, had preferred their personal company to the best which could be offered them.

Poverty did not cause the Arkleys to live in such an out-of-the-way spot as Southcliffe; of that Miss Le Deene felt perfectly satisfied. The interior of the cottage was furnished in the most expensive manner: nothing in the way of comfort or luxury, for which the modest rooms afforded space, was absent. Rich hangings, rare china, exquisite pictures, a magnificent piano; a thousand little nick-nacks that must — so she silently appraised their value — have cost a small fortune.

The tea-service in its way was daintily elegant; “and every thread” — I quote Miss Le Deene’s statement verbatim, as made to her cronies afterwards — “of Master Son and Heir’s dress would bear the closest inspection.”

As for flowers, “the place,” said Miss Le Deene, “is like a horticultural show — banks of them, inside and out; a perfect waste of money, I call it; and on the top of Southcliffe, too, where there is not a living creature but themselves to see the exhibition. But she is the fairest flower of them all; and I do say it is a thousand pities her friends let her marry him.”

And whatever might be thought of the latter part of Miss Le Deene's sentence, there could be no question but that, as has been said before, Mrs. Arkley was as sweet a flower as a man need desire to see in town or country, in crowded rooms amongst others rare and lovely, or blooming in sweet simplicity on the lonely mountain-side.

While her visitor was exercising her astute mind in wandering over all likely possibilities, threading her devious way through pros and cons innumerable, Mrs. Arkley's thoughts had also been upon a journey. Backwards and forwards they had strayed, now over the past, again looking hopefully into the future, finally reverting to the present; and, when they did so, she found that a few minutes' silence, which appeared as she woke from her reverie to have lasted much longer than was really the case, had fallen upon herself and her visitor, whose eyes, with no hint of speculation in them, were now fastened on the blue sea she beheld through a tracery of leaves glittering in the distance.

On the air there came frequent whiffs from the hedge of sweetbriar that bounded one portion of the lawn. The scent was not constantly perceptible, but at intervals it wandered into the room, for a moment putting out of

court the fragrance of roses and the odour of lilies.

Ever after, even in the dead winter time of the year, when Miss Le Deene thought of Mrs. Arkley—which was often—the vision of that charming lady appeared surrounded by a wealth of flowers, while across the waters of memory there stole subtly and gently the perfume of sweetbriar borne on the breath of a faint west wind.

Who amongst us has not some association of the kind? Heaven grant, friends, that yours may be as pure and pleasant as that which brought the memory of Mrs. Arkley wafted to the heart of a hard-featured elderly lady!

“You must excuse my preoccupation,” said Mrs. Arkley, blushing a little, as if she alone had been engrossed in thought; “but I began marvelling why you asked if my husband were proud; was it”—she put the question with a slight hesitancy, and yet archly too—“because we were not present at my sister’s wedding?”

“Good gracious, no!” answered Miss Le Deene, in blunt astonishment, putting down her cup that she might stare the better at Mrs. Arkley. Till this moment I was not even aware you had a sister.”

“Not aware I had a sister?” repeated Mrs Arkley, laughing outright.

"No; how should I know anything about her? Now that I do know I congratulate you on the occasion of her marriage, if it be a matter meet for congratulation. I hope she has made what the world calls a good match?"

"I call it a good match in every respect," answered Mrs. Arkley, the dimples in her face rippling over with fun.

"But I daresay you are romantic. I should not like to take your opinion exactly on a question of this kind. Is the gentleman—has he, in a word, plenty of money?"

"Well, yes," was the reply. "He is young, rich, handsome, kind, generous, considerate."

"A goodly list of virtues," remarked Miss Le Deene.

"And his name is Forrest," added Mrs. Arkley, slyly.

"No! you cannot mean that—not our Mr. Forrest! I believe, you wicked creature, you have been making fun of me all this time. I almost doubt whether you possess a sister."

"Indeed I do—three of them."

"And one is really married to a gentleman named Forrest?"

"To our Mr. Forrest, as you call him."

"But, my dear, how can that be? Mr. Forrest is only married to-day, and to a daughter of the Rev. Sir Hubert Yarrell."

“To Milly; yes, my dear sister. I thought all Southbay knew that.”

If Miss Le Deene had spoken her mind, she would have answered that all Southbay should know it before she slept; but she refrained from that utterance, and tried to conceal the depth of the conversational abyss into which she felt she had descended by talking loquaciously concerning the would-be wisdom of Southbay on matters which did not concern its interests in the least, and its inconceivable ignorance on points that were really important to it; by laughing at the dense stupidity of the little town, and her own stupidity as an inhabitant; telling Mrs. Arkley she was a sly puss, though she looked as innocent as her own baby; winding up by an assurance that the first time she saw Captain Arkley she would complain of having been so mystified and perplexed by his pretty wife as never a sober spinster was mystified and perplexed before.

And so covering what she felt had been a social defeat—a complete rout from a stranger she had rather intended to patronise—with a bold front and an abundance of badinage Miss Le Deene took her leave and wended her way back to Southbay, marvelling greatly as she walked along.

Just before she reached the Parade she met that Mr. Albyn who ought, Southbay considered, to have been agent instead of Mr. Arkley. He was a clever young man, possessed of manners even more decided than those which rendered Miss Le Deene remarkable, and given to a directness of speech which stood him perhaps in better stead in the London law courts than in the drawing-rooms of his native Southbay.

He did not come often to Southbay now, and it was a long time—nearly twelve months—since Miss Le Deene had seen him.

“Going to the dinner?” he asked, when the first salutations were over.

“Are you?” said Miss Le Deene, who was impervious to his raillery.

“Yes,” he answered, “I intend doing so presently; and you——”

“Have been drinking tea with the agent’s wife.”

“Did you see the agent?”

“No; and I do so want to see him, for I fancy there must be something very odd about him.”

“Your fancy has as usual served its mistress faithfully,” remarked Mr. Albyn.

“What is it that is wrong?” asked the lady, eagerly. “None of us have ever been

able to know what to make of them since they took up their quarters at Southcliffe."

"And what did you make of them over the dish of tea?" suggested the young man as a leader.

"Well, I am quite as much in the dark as ever. I do not think Mrs. Arkley's could have been a love match, for her face clouds whenever her husband is mentioned; and though she spoke quite pleasantly about her sister's marriage, still you must remember she was not at the wedding, and I concluded she felt the difference between her own position as wife to a mere agent, when contrasted with the much more suitable alliance Miss Millicent Yarrell has contracted."

"And you think she wishes she had done as well?"

"I do, naturally."

Hearing which, Mr. Albyn burst into what Miss Le Deene in her precise moments called "one of his great horse-laughs."

"This is too good!" he exclaimed. "I beg your pardon, but I cannot help laughing. Why, Forrest wanted to marry Mrs. Arkley herself. He followed her about like her shadow; and it is said she actually accepted him about a quarter of an hour before she met her present husband just back from

the wars. She married Captain Arkley against the wishes of all her people, for Sir Hubert counts as a mere nobody; and the loving pair would not have had a shilling upon which to start housekeeping if it had not been for Forrest. And now I must say good-bye, Miss Le Deene."

And so likewise we must say good-bye to Miss Le Deene, and go back into the 'sixties.

CHAPTER III.

IN the 'sixties, then, there lived in the flattest, breeziest, and healthiest part of the healthy county of Norfolk a certain clergyman named Yarrell.

He was Vicar of Bersey, a remarkably poor living, and, except in the matter of children, he could not be considered richly endowed.

Well-born, well-bred, well-educated, it might have been thought that he had many chances in his favour, and that it was not impossible he might yet achieve great things; but the only member of his house who had ever held out a helping hand was dead; his breeding was of that prepossessing but not very serviceable description which shrinks from contact with those who might possibly prove of benefit; his

education he used in a manner calculated only to make him a bookworm ; and so at eight-and-forty he found himself, as regards fortune, just so much worse than when he was ordained deacon that he had aged a quarter of a century, and was saddled, moreover, with five serious responsibilities in the persons of a wife and four daughters.

Sons had been given to him, but they were dead : opportunities had presented themselves, but he was not the man to avail himself of them. The list of authors with whose works he was intimately acquainted could not be considered other than appalling, but no writer amongst them had been able to teach him how to compose a really fine sermon.

Even if he had managed to do so, it would not have been much appreciated by the members of his congregation. Better for him at Bersey to have known something about sheep and roots, and the points of a good milch-cow, and so win his way to intimacy with his people, than to excel in oratory. But Mr. Yarrell, though unblessed with genius, was not blessed with common sense. If ever a man were made a butt for the irony of fortune, he was that man. If ever a round peg found itself dropped into a square hole, he was that peg. Of rural affairs he knew

even less than he did of courts. With the tillers of the soil, and with the men who looked to their labourers and their wheat-fields to provide bread for their families, he had as much understanding sympathy as with a Chinese. In return his people did not in the least understand him.

That they liked and respected him, and in a vague way were proud of a parson who could read all the books ranged round the walls of his study, arose more perhaps from instinct than from reason.

Mr. Yarrell was a Christian and a gentleman, and if he buried his talents, and rendered both qualities as useless as such qualities ever can be made, it was more his misfortune than his fault.

Such men generally marry young a wife destitute of fortune. Mr. Yarrell married young, a lady who would have brought a better dowry to him had she come with an empty hand.

As matters were, she had a *dot* of three thousand pounds, which was so invested and tied up that it brought in under a hundred a year; but if it had yielded a revenue of thirty thousand, it could not have proved a source of greater annoyance to Mr. Yarrell.

College debts, an unlucky signature—a mere matter of form to oblige a friend—expenses incurred on first entering the Church, an easy

temperament, and a generous heart, had swallowed up the small fortune which his father, a younger son, left to him at his death.

The living of Bersey was, as I have said, poor. Year by year Mr. Yarrell failed to make his outgoings balance his incomings. He had no personal extravagances; he was content to sit down to cold mutton, or to no mutton at all; but Mrs. Yarrell thought the ninety odd pounds a year she possessed warranted a certain expenditure which might not have been necessary had Mr. Yarrell married "a wife without a sixpence;" and consequently the vicar, when debts accumulated, was forced to make an effort and ask assistance from his grandfather. So long as his grandfather lived the periodical famine at Bersey Vicarage was relieved, not in any generous or agreeable manner perhaps, but still relieved.

Sir Bolton Yarrell did not give a penny more than he was asked—very often indeed not so much as he was asked; and though he might have procured his grandson a better and more congenial living, he never made the least effort to do so. But still, to a certain extent, he did help, and it was only when he died that the actual bitterness of insufficient means began to make itself felt at Bersey Vicarage.

In due time there came the accustomed diffi-

culty, and when it had lasted for a longer period than usual, Mr. Yarrell, though his pride winced during the operation, asked the new baronet, his cousin, for help.

Which was refused as curtly and discourteously as can well be imagined.

The latest owner had always been jealous of the favour shown to Mr. Yarrell, slight though the evidences of that favour were, and he told the clergyman in so many words he did not intend to admit the claims of relationship, or to burden himself with the maintenance of any of his kindred.

It was a merciful letter, inasmuch as it was perfectly straightforward and conclusive. The writer encouraged no false hopes, and expressed no sympathy with misfortune, deserved or undeserved. "I have my wife and family to see to," he concluded; "and having been kept out of the property for an unreasonable period, I must now try to make the best I can of it."

He was right enough, no doubt, according to his light. If the old baronet had lived another year he would have been a century old; and the new baronet was not a young man; so, as he said, it behoved him to make the best use of his time.

Though a title may run in a family, old age can scarcely be expected to do so likewise.

On a certain morning in the 'sixties, therefore, things were, in spite of a glorious sunrising, looking very black indeed at Bersey Vicarage.

Susie, the eldest daughter, a girl in age, a child in manner, a woman in mind, acknowledged this fact with a sigh as she laid her father's letters on her father's study-table, and saw that there were even more than the usual number of suspicious-looking envelopes amongst them.

Susie, though still in her teens, was in that family a very tower of strength. If she had been a man she would have gone out and fought lions; she would have striven to slay Goliaths. She was strong in her love, her loyalty, and her tenderness, and it almost broke her young heart to see the gray hairs in her father's head, and to notice how he was getting to stoop, also how much meeker than ever the dear face was growing.

When the trouble and the trial seemed more than she could bear, she was wont to run out into the vicarage garden, and, burying her face in the soft turf growing at the root of some old tree, sob,

"O papa! my own dear, dear, sweet papa!"

Mrs. Yarrell met her trials differently. She breakfasted in bed, and lay on the sofa most part of the day. Each of us has his or her peculiar way of encountering misfortune, and

Mrs. Yarrell generally got the best of hers by maintaining, as far as the outside world was concerned, a masterly inactivity.

Things had arrived at a very bad pass indeed on that especial spring morning; they were so bad Susie could not even cry about them. Her tears seemed dried up, and with reason, perhaps, for the dignity of existence was beginning to oppress her. She was old enough now to suffer the keenest pang a girl's heart can know. News had come that week of the success of our arms in Abyssinia, and to her that the man she had loved all her young life—ever since she could remember anything—loved as boy, stripling, soldier, was badly, though not mortally, wounded.

That morning the perfume of the flowers was not grateful to her, or the gladsome sunshine pleasant. Across the house there seemed to lie the shadow of impending ruin; the very songs of the birds* sounded to her shrill and discordant.

She was not thinking about aught save her father and her lover. She had not a memory to spare for poetry; and yet deep in her heart there lay the same feeling which must have stirred Burns' very soul when he wrote:

"How can ye chant, ye little birds,
And I sae weary, fu' o' care?"

Mr. Yarrell came into the breakfast-parlour, where his four daughters, their one strong willing maid-of-all-work, the handy man who fed the pigs and the poultry, cleaned the knives and boots, attended to the kitchen-garden, and performed all sorts of incongruous labours, were assembled for prayers. The clergyman had read his letters, evidently, for Susie noticed how pale and unnerved he looked, how his hands trembled as he opened the Bible, how weak and shaken his voice sounded, till by an effort he steadied its accents.

"What is it, dear papa?" she whispered, when the little congregation arose, and she was taking the books from the table. "Something dreadful, I am afraid."

"I have had a letter that has shocked me terribly, my child," he answered. "Nothing about Tom," he added hastily, "and nothing about money matters. I cannot talk of it yet."

And contrary to his wont, he took up the newspaper and affected to read, though Susie noticed that he never moved the sheet, and that he seemed scarcely conscious of the printed lines before him.

Susan and Milly looked at each other apprehensively. Milly was five years younger than her sister, two sons having been born between them; but she was quite old enough to under-

stand the family troubles, and to marvel what fresh misfortune could have occurred that had nothing to do with money matters or Tom.

Tom was the only variation in the shape of trouble that Milly's experience could remember.

They had not finished breakfast—Susie, indeed, had only just come downstairs after taking up her mother's second cup of tea—when a loud and demonstrative double knock resounded through the quiet house.

"That is Mr. Marlees," said Susie, turning apprehensively to her father. "Shall I go to him, as you do not seem very well?"

Mr. Yarrell hesitated; a quick, sensitive colour flushed his face and then vanished, leaving it paler than before. Clearly a man not fitted to cope with adversity, to whom the strong, boisterous world might well have afforded to be generous.

Mr. Marlees was a solicitor in good practice in the neighbouring town, distant some four miles from Bersey village.

He professed, and perhaps his profession was true, that though in the course of his business it often fell to his lot to press Mr. Yarrell for money, he desired to stand his friend; and he had accordingly called so often during so many years to try to "arrange matters," that his knock was as well known

as that of the postman, and his visits as much dreaded as those of the plague.

All this time Margaret in the kitchen was washing her hands and rolling down her sleeves and tying on a clean apron preparatory to opening the door, and Mr. Yarrell in the parlour was nervously walking from open window to fern-filled fireplace, and at last saying—

“I wish you would, Susie; and, wait a moment, dear; tell him I must go to London this evening, and that I’ll call upon him about——”

Margaret having opened the door at that instant, Mr. Marlees’ voice rang through the hall, and involuntarily Mr. Yarrell ceased speaking.

“I won’t detain your master one moment, my girl,” were the first words Susie heard spoken, “Not finished breakfast? That is capital. I will announce myself, thank you.” And before Susan could reach the door he was in the room.

Passing Miss Yarrell by, but doing so with an apologetic smile and confiding glance, Mr. Marlees advanced towards the vicar.

“I fear I am intruding, *Sir* Hubert, but I really could not resist the temptation of being the first to offer my congratulations. I trust

every happiness may now attend you. The past has been bitter; even mine may have seemed a hated presence here often, though Heaven knows it has always been my endeavour to pour oil on the waters. Miss Yarrell, you look astonished. Is it possible, is it credible, then, I am the bearer of this good news?"

"Not good news, Mr. Marlees," said the vicar, gently; "most sad and terrible: such a fearful death! Not a moment for—for——. It has unnerved me," he added, turning aside. "I have not as yet mentioned the matter even to my wife."

"God bless me!" exclaimed Mr. Marlees. "Of course it was very terrible, and so forth—sudden, as you say; but we must all die some time, and it is to be hoped he was duly prepared."

"Do you mean that Sir Henry is dead?" interposed Susan, in a gradual crescendo.

"Yes, my dear young lady. Killed in a moment—railway accident; lived an hour, but never spoke after the collision; his boy was dead when extricated."

"O, papa, papa!" cried Susan, flinging herself into her father's arms, the tears streaming down her cheeks. "O poor Sir Henry and the little boy and his widow!"

"Queer family," remarked Mr. Marlees, when

he was recounting the above particulars during the course of the day. "I went there expecting to find them jumping for joy all over the parish, and I give you my word, sir, the father and daughter took on as if they were broken-hearted. If I did not know them to be genuine—if I was not as sure they are sound at the core as that I am standing here—I'd have said they were shamming, by Jove I should! But not a bit of it. Sorry for the dead man, who would have seen the vicar die of starvation before he'd have sent him a five-pound note; sorry for the boy, who stood between them and twelve thousand a year; sorry for the widow, who was never, I'll be bound, sorry for them; and sorry, I daresay, if the truth were known, they will for the future be able to keep a balance at their banker's, and snap their fingers at the bishop!"

It was quite true.

A man like the vicar, even if he be an indifferent preacher and but an incompetent clergyman, cannot read God's word and preach His message, and receive into Christ's flock, and read under wintry skies and summer sunshine that most tender and touching Order for the Burial of the Dead, without being sure there is something in it all: something which makes the mere fact of stepping across a grave

to fame, rank, wealth, a very sad and solemn act; that renders rejoicing in such a case as unseemly as the mirth of a fool, and for an hour places the utter worthlessness of money prominently before the eyes of even the most impecunious of created beings.

CHAPTER IV.

THE height of the season in the year 1873—that year in which the Shah visited England, and the most exclusive people in Christendom bowed down, almost to a man, and worshipped Mammon in the person of an Eastern barbarian.

No story related of the diamond-decked monarch was at that time too improbable to receive credence. All London stood on tiptoe, trying to catch a glimpse of an inner life said to be not over edifying; and the very presence among us of a man at whose nod heads could disappear, who thought no more of ordering a “slave” to be killed than a careful housemaid of sacrificing a spider, gave an impetus to trade and a brilliancy to the West-end which it were devoutly to be wished could be repeated.

In all ranks, amongst all classes, the Shah was a household word. Tom Thumb created

no more profound sensation. The popularity of the Claimant may have proved more enduring; but even that was by no means so universal as the homage rendered to the Shah. We have outlived it, and we have well nigh forgotten the furore he caused, as we have a habit of forgetting most things; but it may be doubted whether we have ever since been so apparently jovial, rich, or prosperous.

To most of the Yarrells, life in 'seventy-three seemed very pleasant. They had grown accustomed to their new state and their strange wealth. In very truth, the old life at Bersey seemed like a far-away dream. It is true Sir Hubert was always troubling himself because he could not do sufficient good; and, indeed, he had never learned the art of doing good efficiently. Lady Yarrell was annoyed to find twelve thousand a year and an old family-tree could not make her a queen of society; and Susan was saddened because no word nor line to her had, during five long years, arrived from her lover.

She had been faithful to him; but he—she did not like to say he had not been faithful, but she felt afraid her memory of the olden story was more tenacious than his.

However that might be, she was free from her engagement—had long been free. She

could have married any one of the suitors who asked her hand ; but to each and to all she answered No.

A softened look, a kindly smile, a gracious word, and lo, the deed was done.

They who came to wed enrolled themselves as friends ; and there is many a wife in England who knows she had once a rival in fair Susan Yarrell, and who does not fear to say so.

The new life was very pleasant to her at first ; but in the year of which I write she was growing somewhat tired of the eternal round of pleasure party-giving and party-going.

“If you would make up your mind to regard me as the old maid of the family,” she said one day to her widowed kinswoman Mrs. Dallwood, “I really think we should be all a great deal happier.” But Mrs. Dallwood shook her head.

“Early times for that, my dear,” she answered. “You have had a grand passion, I suspect ; but you will outlive it. I myself—I, who speak to you—was once over head and ears in love—indeed, I am still in love—with a man who never asked me to marry him ; if he had, I should have accepted him to a certainty, and—been miserable. After all, Susan, love is not everything.”

Susan did not answer, though she thought it was a great deal.

"I think it rather too bad of you not to marry, after all I have done for you," proceeded her friend. "Had you been my own daughter, my own very own, I could not have toiled more indefatigably on your behalf; but you will not help me. You do nothing—smile on no one. You have been out nearly five years. In two years more you will be, as that saucy boy of mine said the other day, a quarter of a century old; and you are yet unmarried. My dear, my dear!" and Mrs. Dallwood shook a warning finger as she spoke, "I will pop in and say how d'ye do to your papa before I go," she went on, almost in a breath. "With his books as usual. Bless the dear man! he loves them better than he ever loved anything, yourself excepted. Of that I am quite certain; but don't tell your mamma I said so."

And with this caution laughingly uttered, Mrs. Dallwood trailed her long train down the ample staircase of Yarrell House, and, peeping into the library, asked,

"Is any one at home? It is only Georgie, who wants to have a chat with her old friend."

With that simple courtesy which never failed him, Sir Hubert greeted his garrulous kinswoman.

"I knew you were here," he said, "and should have come up, but I thought you were having a confidential chat with my dear Susie."

"Quite right, Hubert," she answered; "and now I want to have a confidential chat with you. Why does not—why will not—Susan marry?"

"Had not you better ask Susan yourself, Georgina?" answered Sir Hubert.

"No; she has never volunteered her confidence, and I do not want to force it; but I should like to know. I wish her to marry Mr. Forrest. Who is there stopping the way?"

The baronet paused. He, too, desired that his child should make this match, but he would not urge it on her. He had his memories, his story; and they made him pitiful with regard to the love-tale he had seen unfolding page by page.

"When we lived at Bersey," he began, after a pause, "there resided at a certain place a gentleman called — But no; I will not mention names. The story is all you desire to be told."

Mrs. Dallwood inclined her head. She was a shrewd woman, and knew, if she required to do so hereafter, she could put two and two together in five minutes.

"He was not wealthy. If he had been we probably should not have known him so intimately. It was a fine old place, a lovely place;

but the owner was almost as poor as ourselves. He was a widower," proceeded Sir Hubert: "a maiden sister kept house for him, and there were sons and daughters, and a nephew. I never recollect the time when Susie and that nephew were not promised to each other. I think when she could scarce toddle she was called Tom's little wife."

"And what became of Tom?" asked Mrs. Dallwood.

"He went for a soldier," answered the baronet, sadly. "All his people had fought for their country and why not he? Ay, I remember the day he came to show himself to us in his uniform. I can see his open handsome face, his frank laughing smile. I can hear the tone of his voice. My poor lad! my poor, honest, honourable boy!"

"Did he die?"

"No; O, no. He went out to Abyssinia, and there performed a deed of valour which gained him the Victoria Cross and sent him to Malta invalided. We have not seen him since. My darling wrote to him, but he never answered her letter. I also wrote to him to say that our change of fortune could make no difference in my feelings towards him."

"You dear simpleton, I'll be bound you did; and what answered the hero?"

"He thanked me; but he said the engagement must now be considered at an end. He did not intend to return home. He had exchanged into a regiment ordered to India; and—and, in short, Georgina, the lad was too proud to bring his poverty home to share our riches. I know that, I feel that, because——"

He stopped, and Mrs. Dallwood's lips moved, though no sound issued from them.

"What did you say, Georgina?" he asked.

"I said nothing," was the answer; "but I was asking, like the man in Hawthorne's romance, for my lost life. 'I want my happiness,' cried poor Clifford. Ah, Hubert, what numbers of lost lives there are jostling elbows with us if we could only see them!"

If Susie had been present at that moment she could have guessed the name of the man Mrs. Dallwood had loved and never married.

"Well, at any rate he is clear out of the field," she remarked, after a minute's silence; "and there is no reason why Susan should not marry Mr. Forrest."

"I fear she will never care for any one as she did for Tom."

"That may be; but I do not suppose you want her to go through life a maiden 'all forlorn.' Talk to her, Hubert. Tell her how happy she could make a good man."

And Susan's father said, with a sigh, he would talk to her.

CHAPTER V.

“IT is like a scene in fairyland. I feel as if I were walking on enchanted ground.”

It was Miss Yarrell who spoke—Miss Yarrell in the prettiest of dresses—Miss Yarrell standing on the softest of grass—Miss Yarrell looking with bright delighted eyes at a spectacle worth remembering.

Beauty, rank, fashion were before her eyes; the fairest of women, the most distinguished of men, the noblest in the land, were all grouped before her on historic ground.

“Not a step we take,” said Sir Hubert, “but has been trodden before by those who have made England famous. Eyes long closed have looked at those magnificent hedges; lips that here will never open again have criticised those statues; scarce a tree but has its story.”

“My dear cousin,” interposed Mrs. Dallwood, “let us live for a few hours in the present. I want Susan to see every thing and person she can see. Upon the like we shall probably never look again. We are making history at this moment, just as truly as your dead-and-

gone celebrities made it long ago. If you prefer contemplating the mountain-ash you were speaking about as we drove along, to looking at the Queen, the Shah, and this brilliant company, go and find it, if it be still in existence, by all means; but leave Susan with me."

"His last look on that mountain-ash was his last look on Nature," quoted the baronet, referring to Fox.

"Yes; and we have now such an opportunity as may never again present itself of looking on Art," retorted Mrs. Dallwood. "It is, as Susan says, like a scene in fairy-land. Behold our sweet and lovely Princess! see how pleasantly the Prince is smiling! Contemplate the Shah! It is a pity the elephant they had here in 1828 is not present, wandering up and down, eh, Hubert?"

"The Shah and his retinue give quite a sufficient air of 'Asiatic pageantry' to the entertainment," answered her relative; "but still the elephant would have been an agreeable addition."

"Do you see the rabbits scudding across the grass, away in that hollow, papa?" asked Miss Yarrell.

"Do you see the group in that tent, young lady?" asked Mrs. Dallwood. "Pray remember the trouble I have taken to get you here, and

attend to nothing but the wonderful assemblage of which it is your extraordinary privilege to form a part."

The young lady laughed.

"I am not ungrateful, indeed," she said; "but I think the scenery and the accessories go to make up the whole of this marvellous play. I fancy I must be dreaming. When I look back and remember Bersey Vicarage, I am sure it cannot be I. No transformation-scene was ever so extraordinary as this change. Ah!"

"What is it, Susan?"

"Only that poor gentleman."

"Which poor gentleman? O, I see. Now what can induce a person so horribly disfigured to venture among such a company as this?"

"How is he disfigured, Georgina?" inquired the baronet, interested.

"I can hardly say. I have only caught a glimpse of his face twice: once when he reverently lifted the hem of Susan's cloak, which the naughty puss was carrying so carelessly that it swept the ground; and again when he put some one aside who was blocking up our way as we were coming out of Covent Garden Theatre. He has a chivalrous manner, but he ought to go veiled, like the Prophet of Khoristan."

They were at Chiswick, at the garden-party given by the Prince of Wales in honour of the Shah. It was a most brilliant company, and no doubt others besides Mrs. Dallwood had marvelled to see amongst that gay throng a man so stricken that he hurried away from the surprised glances which met him, and plunged into the lonelier walks leading through the wilderness, where he encountered but few of his species, and where the heavy foliage threw a welcome shade across his path.

"I wonder, Susie, where your papa has gone?" said Mrs. Dallwood after a time.

"To find an old gardener or labourer, or some one who has worked here for more than forty years," answered Susan. "Papa wants to know if he remembers Fox and Canning."

"Good gracious!" cries Mrs. Dallwood, turning to Mr. Forrest, who had joined her party, "Sir Hubert is as bad as Miss Blimber: he cares for nothing which has not been dead and buried."

"He told me," remarked Mr. Forrest, "he wanted to have a quiet look at the house Lord Hervey said was "too small to inhabit and too large to hang to one's watch." Chiswick is more truly classic ground to him than you can well imagine. He is in the spirit to-day, not with present Royalty or Eastern magnifi-

cence, but with Horace Walpole, and Evelyn, and Pope, and Gay, and Lady Holland, and all the rest of the people who have made Chiswick famous."

"But we are making it famous too," said Mrs. Dallwood, "and why should he neglect us?"

Susan laughed, and yet there was a slight shadow across her face. She knew very well the point at which Mrs. Dallwood was aiming. She understood perfectly she desired Mr. Forrest should have another chance of pleading his cause and—well—why not? Why should she still refuse to please him and all her friends?

She liked him; she esteemed him. He was aware her girlhood had been so passed as to render her indifferent to the follies and fashions and pleasures of the world; and he professed himself quite ready to adapt his tastes to hers.

He would accept her views that great wealth involved great responsibilities. He was more than willing that she, an almost dowerless maiden, should teach him—whose riches dated only from the success of his own father at the Australian diggings, and the prudent investments of the proceeds of those diggings by his grandfather, an old sea-captain resident at Southbay—how to spend his income to the welfare of man and the glory of God; and she—

If she only could have schooled herself to forget the years and years during which she loved the lover who had given her up; if she could only have regarded as dead and gone the story of those years, their cherished associations, the glamour that seemed to hang around them!

Was this great party—this assemblage of the loveliest and noblest in the land—any pleasanter to her than the impromptu dances up at the Hall, the croquet on the lawn, the lingering walk home by moonlight, the cheery laughter of the young happy guests? No. She knew the life she would best have liked; but if God had appointed her life differently, should she murmur?

As a great lady could she not confer happiness upon many? And after all, as her father had long taught her, was it not better to consider others than herself?

She had loved and she had lost—yea, truly; but could she not still do her duty to a man who loved her? She would try. In so many words she did not tell him this, during the minutes seized when Mrs. Dallwood chose to find amusement and occupation elsewhere; but she asked time to think over his proposal.

“I like you so much, Mr. Forrest,” she said,

frankly, "that I could not do you a great wrong. I must feel quite sure of myself before I promise to be all that you ask."

It was not much, perhaps; but from her Mr. Forrest understood the words meant a great deal. He knew perfectly there was some old love affair that had stood hitherto between him and success, and he comprehended the struggle it must cost a nature like hers to overcome an affection evidently the growth of years.

It was clear to him she cared for no one in the circle to which she had been transplanted; whatever the story, its commencement could only be read in the annals of her simple and innocent girlhood. There was no page of her life open now which contained a word of that fair dream.

Some day, perhaps, she would tell him all about it—how the love struck root, how it grew, how it withered; but if she never spoke of that passage in the April of her life, he felt he should be satisfied; certain she would not give her hand till her heart could ratify the solemn vows uttered by her lips; convinced, if no other in the world were true, she was to be relied on; satisfied she would not wed him for the sake of his lands and his gold; and that if she ever came

to him, it would be to make the very blessing of his home.

It was getting on towards evening. Ere long the period would be at hand for the guests to depart. Sir Hubert—who had long previously settled his mind as to the exact position of the room in which the “greatest debater the world ever saw,” the most “Demosthenean speaker since Demosthenes,” breathed his last; seen the great mulberry-tree; carefully inspected Scheemaker’s lions; the gateway which, through the medium of Pope, said,

“Inigo Jones put me together ;

. Sir Hans Sloane

Let me alone !

So Burlington brought me hither ;”

the antique statues from Adrian’s gardens; the most remarkable palm-tree on which the eye of man ever rested; and the hundred other objects, of no great value in themselves, perhaps, but interesting because of their historical and literary associations—bethought himself to remark what a pity it seemed Lady Yarrell had not been well enough to accompany them.

“She will never behold such a sight again,” he finished; and then Mrs. Dallwood laughed, and said,

“Already, you see, it is fading into the

past, and so becoming clear to your vision. Let us go down to the river-side, and watch the shadows and the sun playing at hide-and-seek."

"It is a pity the stream is not purer," observed a lady who was walking with them, and who seemed to know every square inch of the place, every tree and shrub and blade of grass within the walls. "To my thought the water is the loveliest object in the landscape, and flowing through such classic ground it ought to be bright and clear and undefiled. There is something very sad about the banks—sad, pensive, and dreamy. I wonder often when I sit here, quite quietly by myself, what thoughts came into the minds of the great statesmen and poets and wits as they wandered beside this still tranquil river. It always seems to me to be whispering about the nothingness of life."

"It seems to me we are getting very melancholy," interposed Mrs. Dallwood, seeing that Sir Hubert was about to follow the lady's lead. "Let us go through the temple; there is a pretty view of the bridge to be had at the foot of the steps on the other side."

They passed through. If aught in this world be an accident, it was only by the merest chance they entered the place at that moment.

It was empty, except for an individual who rose from a bench when he saw them, and, bowing to the lady, hurriedly left the building, keeping his face bent down.

She turned and looked after him thoughtfully, with a wistful pity shining tenderly in her sweet face.

"That poor Captain Arkley," she said, "how sadly sensitive he is!"

In a moment Miss Yarrell's hand was on her arm.

"What name did you say?" asked the girl, breathlessly.

"Arkley; he that was so terribly wounded in the——"

Susan was out of the place in a moment. Before her father could speak or Mrs. Dallwood interpose, she had hurried down the steps, and was speeding after the man, who walked drearily alone through the beauty and the peace of that lovely place, as he fancied he was doomed to walk drearily alone through life.

Her training had not been that of the great world. In this supreme moment she thought of nothing, remembered nothing, save the sweet love-story of old, and the cruel fate which had so distorted the handsome kindly face that even she utterly failed to recognise it.

Without a word of explanation she under-

stood. She forgot the years that had passed, the friends she had left, the goodly company on the lawn above.

"Tom," she cried, "Tom!" and as he turned, she stretched out her hands to him, and sobbed aloud.

Mr. Forrest had followed her, but he now retraced his steps.

"Let us leave them alone," he said to Mrs. Dallwood; and then he walked away silent and stricken.

He, too, understood that the man did not live who after that could come between Susan and her lover.

They stood together on the bridge spanning the Bollar; but neither saw the greensward sloping down to the water's edge, the wild cherry-trees, the expanse of broad park across which the westering sun was streaming.

With one hand he shaded his eyes, with the other he clasped hers, which lay on the parapet of the bridge. There was not a creature near them; they were as much alone as they might have been in some "vast wilderness."

She was not looking at him; down into the depths of the water she seemed to be gazing; but she did not see the sun shimmering on the river. Slowly, and as if wrung from her, the big tears fell one by one into the stream, while he

gazed wistfully, mournfully, at the loveliness he had voluntarily relinquished, which he meant to go away and behold no more.

"I ought not to have come back," he said at last; "but the longing to look upon your face again grew into a fever which overmastered my strongest resolutions. I am happy now, Susan, and can leave you after this meeting with content."

"You will never leave me again," she said brokenly.

The birds sang their loudest—there was the plash of a water-fowl in the stream—in the distance there was the sound of music—a gay strain came floating through the summer air.

"I must, my dear," he answered. "You would give yourself to me I know of your goodness and your faithfulness, but I could not accept such a sacrifice. When the very children—you remember how fond all children were of me once—cried if I came near them, I felt it was time to relinquish my hopes of a wife."

"But I am not a child," she exclaimed, "and you shall not relinquish me. What! had my poor face been marred, would you have taken back your love? Do you think it was your good looks I cared for? Do you imagine all the beauty in the world could seem as precious to me as your scarred features are in my sight?"

‘Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds.’ Nothing can part my heart from yours.”

“Ah, Susan,” he answered sadly, “you do not know what you are talking about—you do not understand the full weight of the burden you offer to carry with me. Even yet,” he added, “you have never dared to look me full in the face. You have not seen the extent of the disfigurement I long to hide from the sight of my fellows.”

She lifted her head and wiped away her tears.

“Let me look at you, then,” she said? and he removed his sheltering hand and stood upright, with the evening sunshine streaming full upon him.

“I think it is Sir Archibald Alison,” she began slowly, the loveliest light dawning in her eyes, “who tells this story. A young lady was engaged to a gentleman, just as you and I were engaged. She loved him with all her heart, just as—” she paused and smiled. “He went away, and while on foreign service he met with a cruel accident. He was maimed—crippled. So they told the girl about it. They explained that he was a mere wreck of the active handsome fellow she remembered; and they waited expecting she would break off the engagement, from which he released her. Do you remember her answer?”

“I never heard the story,” he replied.

"She said, 'If he has body enough left to hold his soul I will marry him;' and that is my answer to you."

He had faced the enemy, but he turned aside from her.

"It cannot be, my brave love," he said. "It cannot, cannot be!"

But it was. She had her own will at last, and as the years pass by she fancies that the beloved face grows more like what it was in the old house at Bersey. She trusts that the quiet life, the satisfied heart, will in time counteract a portion of the distortion, and that some day her husband may cease to shrink from the gaze of strangers, and understand that all who know him forget the features so marred and seamed, and only remember the glorious bravery of the deed by which his scars were won.

not wait for the Earl's company, but travel on without delay. The period of his return must be uncertain; but he would send instructions home from time to time.

"Thus, once again we were all quiet at Johnesborough; and mighty dull I found it, after London.

"True, one day we were all flung into a state of excitement by a visit from the Earl. Posting up from the North, where he had been staying, he took Johnesborough in his way, and put the footman, who answered the door, into a state of bewilderment by asking to see me.

"'Is Thomas Walters here?' inquired his Lordship; 'send him to me directly;' and, without waiting to be asked, he walked into the library, the door of which chanced to be open.

"I found the Earl in one of his tempers.

"What was the meaning of Mr. Will being sent for, and he not? Was not the dying lady his mother, and who could be nearer to her than he? What had Mr. Will said? Did I know who wrote the letter? Had I heard anything of its contents? Though I was but a servant, still I had known the Earl all my life, and he spoke to me just as freely and as angrily as Mr. Will might have done, if anything had chanced to put him in a passion.

“Careless about his papers as about all his other concerns, my master had tossed the doctor’s letter on his table, and left it there; and as I knew he had no secrets from anybody, I gave it to the Earl to read. It was written in some foreign language, and his Lordship had trouble to make it out; but he managed to do so at last, and then, throwing it down, broke forth again—What was the meaning of their not sending to him?

“‘The letter may have gone astray, my Lord,’ I ventured to suggest, and my words fell like oil on troubled waters.

“It might—it had; here was the solution of the enigma. Of course his mother must have sent for him. Thus the Earl ran on, ending by saying I was an honest fellow and attached to the family.

“The mercury of his temper fell as rapidly as it had risen. His voice resumed its usual tone; his brow cleared; he threw himself into an easy chair, and allowed me to get him some refreshment. He praised the vintages loved by the departed Snyjthe-Johnes, talked to me about Mr. Will and my new mistress, spoke of his own sons, and, in a word, was as pleasant as any gentleman could be. There were some letters for his nephew and for his nephew’s wife; and when I mentioned this

with an indescribable joy at sight of the fields whence the grain had been carried, brightening as the sun rose and climbed higher and higher.

“Well, it only comes to this—I was young and I am old, and other lads whip the trout streams and flush the partridges and astonish Madame Hare ; for the world is going and coming, and I am going—and some one else is coming fast after me, and there is somebody behind him, and somebody else following that one in turn.

“Ay, it is a queer road we travel from boyhood on, and ever on, as fast as ever our feet will carry us, till we reach a point when we want to turn back for good, and never be anything again but boys for evermore.

“You will wonder at a fat old fellow like me—nothing but a village innkeeper—having such notions as these ; but if you had known Mr. Will when he was a young man, you would not be surprised at my having learned what has since passed many a lonely hour of my life.

“He was the most devil-me-care young gentleman I ever did see—always in debt, always falling in love—quite as often falling out of it—in one way the most reckless, restless, extravagant master a man could have had, and yet, in another, thoughtful, and occasionally even sad.

““Why did my uncle bring me up to al

this, Tom?' he would say sometimes, pointing to the useless and expensive articles he gathered about him. 'Why did he not put me to some honest calling? If he had not a living to spare, why could not he have made a lawyer of me? I think, Tom, I might have been Chief Justice myself, issuing urgent invitations to various poor wretches to appear before his most gracious Majesty, instead of having to decline his most gracious Majesty's pressing invitations as best I can. It is enough to drive a fellow mad. I have the tastes, habits, extravagances of ten thousand a year, and I never had but a bare five hundred pounds per annum, which went to the Jews (would the race had never been permitted to leave Babylon) half a century ago, or thereabouts.'

"That was his style, and a man, no matter how stupid he might be, could not help brightening up a little under such an employer.

"We are very much like horses; a slow one always tries to keep pace with a fast goer—I did. For instance, I did not understand what Mr. Will meant by an invitation to appear before George the Fourth, till I had read the next writ which my master flung down on his dressing-table with an oath, when that little blackguard, Simeon—a true descendant of him who, with his brother Levi, is stigmatized in

Holy Writ, as 'having instruments of cruelty in their habitations' — touched him on the shoulder, and asked him, rather pressingly, to spend the evening at Mr. Absalom's in Cursitor Street.

"The wretch had contrived to reach even the innermost sanctuary by representing himself as a hairdresser and his man as an assistant.

" 'Good-bye, Tom,' said Mr. Will, after I had taken off his swallow-tailed coat and helped him on with another, holding out his hand just as if he had been my equal—and by that I knew he felt it dreadfully—'Good-bye, and keep up your spirits. I will disappoint these cursed Jews one of these days, if it be even at the expense of an ounce of lead.'

"And then, with a mocking bow, he turned to Simeon and said, 'It is not to your tribe I am alluding, my dear fellow. I fancy it has not been all milk and honey with your branch of the family, and that the rough part of the labour fell to your share, even at the Tower of Babel. Possibly you did the hod-work there, which would have made an Irishman dizzy.'

"And so he went—a gentleman, every inch of him—for the last time to Cursitor Street.

"You may guess how I felt after he was gone. Every time these fellows had him in their

clutches, it seemed harder and harder for him to get out of them again.

"All he owned had gone long and long before. His relatives would neither give nor lend him a shilling. His friends were getting tired, and I could not wonder at it. One gentleman may be willing enough to help another at a pinch, but it is not in Christian nature to like spending good money to fill a Jew's coffers.

"I sat down in the dressing-room he had just left, with his clothes littered about as he had thrown them off, and wondered where we could turn for help—wondered till I grew tired with casting about in my mind whether there was one left who would see him out of this trouble, and if so, where that one ought to be looked for.

"And then, supposing somebody could be found now, who would help him on the next occasion?

"Things had been getting worse and worse with us for a long time.

"My head was young then, but it grew giddy reckoning up, or rather trying to reckon up, what he owed, and how the tangle was ever to be unravelled, when who should walk in but a lawyer who had seen Mr. Will through a few bad scrapes.

"Though on the last occasion he had vowed he would never advance another sixpence, still my heart leaped into my mouth for joy at sight of him.

"‘Your master is gone to Berkeley Square, Walters, I suppose,’ he began. ‘I saw the Countess was entertaining, as I passed, but I thought I would take my chance of finding him dressing, and late as usual. Will you tell him he had better keep out of the way for a little while? Marston is going to arrest, and two or three more will follow suit. Thought he would like to know. What an extravagant sinner it is!’ he added, looking at the array of articles on the toilet table; and he would have gone with that, but I shut the door, and implored him to listen to me.

"My head, as I have said, was dizzy with thinking, and planning, and scheming, and I was thankful to find any one to speak to about our trouble.

"Mr. Will’s debts had that night, so to speak, marshalled themselves before my eyes, and I faced them as he would not have done, and talked of them as he could not.

"Perhaps I was wrong to speak so freely of things that I only knew in confidence; but I could not help it. I loved Mr. Will with all my heart, and those Jews, with their evil

faces, and heavy gold chains sprawling over their gaudy waistcoats, and huge rings on their dirty fingers, had filled me with a disgust and hatred that I could not have expressed in words.

"Although he happened to be a lawyer, Mr. Perrin was a gentleman. As a rule, I do not think much of lawyers and such like; but they say every rule has its exception, and Mr. Perrin was an exception to mine.

"I think he must have been fond of Mr. Will, too. Lawyers, even the worst of them, I have noticed, entertain a sort of sneaking fondness for wild characters, for reckless, improvident chaps, such as Mr. Will used to be. It is the redeeming point in their natures. There may be a providence about it, too, as there is about a mother being fondest of her lame, or blind, or imbecile child. Anyhow, it was not for the money he got out of Mr. Will, his lawyer looked after his affairs *then*. He is making a good thing of the Earl of Dugdale's estates now; but, Lord! which of us at that time ever dreamed he would some day reign at Oakhill?

"I, for one, never could have served him as I did, with a perfectly single heart, had such a change seemed probable, or even possible.

"I stuck to him as one might to a cheery comrade in a bitter fight, or a shipwrecked companion to a—but there, why do I go on talking such nonsense?"

"He was a poor master and I a poor servant, and he made me his friend, and I loved him, for all he was the Honourable William Pattingham and I Tom Walters; and I think, for the same reason that I was fond of Mr. Will, Mr. Perrin liked him too.

"With a very grave face he listened to what I had to say, and then he remarked—

"‘I had no idea things were so bad as all this comes to, Walters.’

"Then I made answer—

"‘Sir, they are worse; and you would think so too, if only in a minute, so to speak, I was able to remember all about everything.’

"‘You have remembered enough,’ he said, and sat for a minute quiet. Then he got up to go, but stopped to observe—

"‘I wish your master would follow my advice.’

"‘He would follow anything, sir, that meant ease of mind and a berth in the Colonies,’ I was bold enough to reply.

"‘Following my advice would mean ease of mind and a comfortable life in England.’

"‘Ah! sir, I don’t think his pride would

let him do that,' I answered, for I thought Mr. Perrin wanted my master to pass through the Court, and I knew it would go sorely against the grain to have such a proposal even made to him.

"It was not the fashion then, as it is now, for noblemen to shuffle off their debts in that way like any butcher or grocer; and it may be that the very idea of its being supposed Mr. Will could so demean himself, made me speak quick and sharp; but Mr. Perrin only laughed, and said—

"His pride did not stand in the way of his getting into debt, and ought not to stand in the way of his getting out of it; it is not so much his pride though as his prejudices.' I looked in a dictionary, after he went away, to learn what he meant by the last word, but the dictionary explanation did not help me.

"Next day he came back again; 'Marston has been paid,' he said, 'and your master has left Cursitor Street; but I have advised him not to come back here until an arrangement can be effected with the tribes of Israel; so if you put up some of his clothes I will take them with me.'

"Can't I go to him, sir?' I asked.

"No, you had better stay where you are,

CHAPTER II.

“YOU did not say the other evening how Lady Dugdale’s diamonds were found.”

It was a Londoner sojourning at the “Dugdale Arms,” who addressed this remark to Mr. Thomas Walters.

He had come down to Oakmede to spend his summer holiday in that land of many waters and thick dark woods, and found mine host an invaluable companion when he went fishing or preferred to idle away a few hours in the inn garden, or sauntering through the grounds at Oakhill. At Oakhill the landlord seemed as much master as the Earl himself. He passed in and out it, no man asked him why or wherefore. He was on good terms with the head gardener and most intimate with the butler. He knew the history and value of every picture in the house, and when from one of the terraces he pointed out the wide and beautiful landscape that stretched away below, anyone might have imagined it was he who owned all those goodly acres—the park and farms of Oakhill, the village of Oakmede, the grey old church with the squat tower, the ruins of Oakwater Castle, the oak trees which gave a name to the neighbourhood

and a character to the whole district, the yew hedges, the stately peacocks, the clear swift stream, nay, even the wild flowers springing by the road side—he loved them all. “It was my calf ground,” he would say, with a fat chuckle of content, “my father and my grandfather and my great grandfather lived in that house you see yonder down in the hollow below the long plantation—yes the place with those red tiled barns, almost hidden among the hay and corn stacks. My brother lives there now. There’s no better land in the shire—why the apples in the orchard beat any in the Earl’s gardens. To look back to the time when his lordship was a wild young rascal, when there was no mischief he was not up to, and I not far behind, you may be sure! I might have had a farm myself if I had chosen—the pick of the best of them, so to speak—but I knew little about stock and crops, and such like. When I was young I did not give my mind to things of that sort, and afterwards I was too old to learn; besides, I don’t think the life is one that would ever have suited me. When a man has been accustomed to human society he can’t bring himself down to consorting for the most part with animals. About the diamonds, sir! No, there is not any secret in the matter, only there are things one does

not care to talk about before everybody. I am ready and willing though to tell you the whole history, if you care to listen."

"I have often thought and said to Mr. Will—the present Earl, you understand—that if nobody ever did anything in a hurry, there would be very little done in this world. When a man stands looking at a leap, considering whether he will take it or not, he either never jumps at all, or jumps short. If I had been a slow, cautious fellow I'd never have thrown a few things into a carpet-bag and flung myself out of Johnesborough as I did, saying I would not look in my dear master's face again till the diamonds were found. It was a mad, wild statement for anyone to make, taking into account the whole bearings of the case, and the poor chance there seemed of tale or tiding of the lost jewels ever being heard; but I considered nothing. I was cut to the very soul. Though so many years have passed, and all that once seemed so wrong has come right, and the crooked has been made straight, there are still times when I feel as if I can't bear to look back upon the misery and mortification I went through then.

"We had sailed rough seas together. I had been faithful in storms and tempests; I had stuck by Mr. Will, not for money, but for

love, and it did fall hard on me—it did, sir—that a woman should part us, and impute dishonesty to one who would have died to protect his master's property.

“As I talk I feel my blood tingling as it did in those days that are so long gone by. Then I was still so weak from the injuries I had received, I cried as I locked my boxes and took up the bag, which was all the luggage I meant to take with me. The housekeeper brought me a glass of wine, but I could not drink a drop. If I could, I would not; My Lady's money had paid for it.

“‘You are a very foolish young man,’ said Mrs. Barrett.

“Perhaps I was, but I had taken the leap running and meant to go on to the end.

“The first place I went was to the farm yonder, where I stayed till I got up my strength a bit. My father wanted me to stop at home and throw in my lot with the rest. He made me a good offer, but I could not accept it. Those diamonds were before me day and night. Till I could get to London after them I felt I should know no peace, and, indeed, in their hearts the old people were as anxious the matter should be made clear as myself. No shadow even of a stain had ever lain across our name before, and there was not one

of us could rest while this suspicion lay over me.

“Before, however, I started for London, news came to Oakhill. Another person had left Johnesborough in consequence of the loss of the diamonds. This time it was none other than Mr. Will himself.

“He had taken my dismissal so sorely to heart, he said more, perhaps, on the subject to My Lady than was exactly wise, and in the course of an altercation, which ensued between them after I was gone, she let some words slip which showed she believed the whole matter to be a plot between Mr. Will and myself.

“Mrs. Barrett, who happened to be in the room at the time, told me afterwards, he just gave his wife one look, and said—

“‘I have fallen low enough, but I can’t live with a woman who thinks I am a thief,’—then he walked out of the house, looking as white as I had done when he told me I must leave.

“The next My Lady heard of him was from the Dowager, who came to Johnesborough in a fine rage—saying she would sooner have lost all the diamonds in England than that such an insult should have been put on her grandson, or her grandson’s faithful and devoted servant.

"It was then Mrs. Pattingham, I think, began to understand money is not everything, or that the possession of it does not give the right to man or woman to judge harshly, and impute bad motives to those poorer than themselves. The Dowager did not spare her. If the great heiress never heard truth before, she heard it then. All her life long she had been criticising the faults of other people, but now she was forced to listen to a recital of her own.

" 'He will never come back to you, never,' said the old Countess. 'I know William Pattingham well, and though he has the sweetest nature and the most forgiving temper in the world, you have dealt him just the one blow a man of his temperament must find it impossible to forget.'

"And, indeed, it seemed as if the Dowager was right, for though My Lady wrote letter after letter to Mr. Will—who had borrowed money from his uncle and started for America—entreating him to return, expressing her sorrow, and stating she felt sure he knew nothing of the diamonds, he steadily refused to come back, and he might have stopped away till now, if he had not seen one day an announcement in the *Times* that he was a father, for that a little daughter had been born at Johnesborough.

“At the news his pride softened, and his anger melted away; he instantly set out for England, and appearing suddenly before his wife, who had long given up the hope of again seeing him, was so touched by her tears, her smiles, her almost inarticulate words of welcome, her delight, her repentance, her humility, and the look with which she placed her baby in his arms, that he fell in love with her there and then, and to my certain knowledge has staid in love with her ever since.

“And it was simply wonderful to see the change his love made in her. She got younger looking—handsome she could never be—but a pleasanter-faced lady you would not desire to meet. What between Mr. Will’s coaxing, and the Dowager’s scolding, and seeing more of the way gentlefolks-born conduct themselves, she got rid, by degrees, of that haughty, trying manner she had when I knew her first. The good there was in her then, is in her now, but in most respects she is another woman, affable and agreeable, and well liked by high and low.

“While Mr. Will stopped away the Dowager was very good to My Lady, stood by her shoulder to shoulder—but she cured her fidgeting, and domineering, and interfering, and

suspecting—and fitted her to move in and adorn the rank to which she has now attained.

“Poor Mr. Will—that night when he took off his dress coat and went away with Simeon to Cursitor Street—little thought he would ever come to be the eighth Earl of Dugdale.”

“But the diamonds?”

“Yes, Sir, I am coming to them, only I thought you would like to know what was going on at Johnesborough during the long time I stayed away.

“A reward had, of course, been offered for them—as much as one thousand pounds—but nothing came of it. Mr. Charles Sanders might have been hanged and dissected for all the authorities seemed able to tell about him; and if the diamonds had been taken out into the middle of the Atlantic, and sunk there, they could not have more totally disappeared.

“I spent two years of the best part of my life looking for them, and I might have lost the whole of it, following up clues that led me nowhere, if I had not at last got so wretchedly poor I was forced, for the sake of mere food and shelter, to turn to and work.

“My father was very good and liberal, grudging me no money I asked, and keeping my spirits up for a long time, just by dint of sheer kindness and sympathy; but I felt, at

last, I could not go on taking his hard earnings for what really seemed a hopeless quest.

"Yet it appeared still more impossible for me to return to service, to cease to be master of my own time, to be unable to go where I liked, as I liked, without question put, or reason given.

"At that period I was lodging with a man who kept a greengrocer's shop in the Bloomsbury district. He had been butler in what he called a 'gent's family,' a good, liberal, free-handed, rich gent at one time he was, who, he told me, 'dealt in hops, and made a mint of money. I managed to save something out of my wages, and when my master smashed up I married the cook, who had put by something too, and we opened this shop, and haven't done so bad; all things considering.'

"I should think they had not, indeed. He was the man, and that was the district for making money. He had an excellent connection; he bought cheap and he sold dear; at the large houses, which abound all about there, his wife often helped to cook the vegetables he supplied, and, of an evening, it was his regular occupation to hand the potatoes round at table he had weighed out in the morning.

"He did not give very good weight—that

I knew—but what might be lacking in one respect, was made up in high prices.

“‘They can afford it,’ he said, in frank explanation. ‘When they come to die—or have to go through the bankruptcy court—a few pounds more or less for greengrocery can’t make much odds to them, and it makes all the difference to me.’

“It was not any business of mine to mend my landlord’s morals, so I heard all he had to say and answered nothing. The only thing I wanted was to get on the wind of the Dugdale diamonds, and a less likely neighbourhood in which to get scent of them than Bloomsbury, I often thought, it might have puzzled any one to find in London.

“Still, I knew that the instinct which had taken me there, in close proximity to Chancery Lane, was correct. The men who planned the robbery knew everything about Mr. Will’s antecedents, and must have heard his debts and difficulties freely canvassed in that Jews’ corner. Since I started, on what I afterwards found was really a fool’s errand, I had paced the streets where bailiffs and such-like are to be met with, going in and out of their employers’ offices, and hanging around on the chance of a job hundreds of times. My hope was I should run across Mr. Charles Sanders or his com-

panion, speaking to some of these men. It was but a forlorn one; yet I never went out that the dim expectation of some unforeseen adventure did not stir my pulses, and though so far I had always failed, still luck, I said, could not constantly go against me.

"I was, in fact, like a man at a gambling-table—the worse my fortune the more persistently I played on. So, as I told you just now, two years passed away, during the whole of which time I never earned a penny.

"When I began to feel I must turn my hand to something I asked Mr. Trimmer, the greengrocer, if he could not recommend me to a job now and then. I intimated that the business which had brought me to London might not be concluded for some time to come, and hinted if I were able to make a little money at odd times, such help to my income would prove acceptable.

"I was careful not to tell my worthy landlord—whose measure I had taken pretty accurately—I found myself in any pecuniary strait; and, fortunately for me, he did not jump at any conclusion of the kind. At a very early stage of our acquaintance he decided, as he afterwards told me, by 'putting two and two together,' I was in town about a lawsuit, to which there might be something

hanging, and he listened, therefore, with gracious complacency to my request.

"He said he should be glad of my help, that he would have made the proposal before, but he did not care to run the risk of giving offence. He often wanted an extra hand or two. It would be a real satisfaction to him to treat me as liberally as he could, and so forth.

"My clothing was good, my appearance was respectable. He saw I had been accustomed to the 'best of families,' understood 'what was what,' and the 'things that were expected,' all of which being, of course, extremely satisfactory to Mr. Trimmer, we soon struck a bargain, and I began to see a very different sort of life to any I had ever seen before.

"Little things in it, however, at times reminded me of Mrs. Pattingham's ways and notions, and I soon understood that here was the school where the great Smyjthe-Johnes, must have received his early education.

"I had many funny and many strange experiences, but I kept a grave face and a quiet tongue, and won golden opinions from Mr. Trimmer, and received many substantial proofs of goodwill and satisfaction from his employers.

"It was an evening in August—I shall never forget it—some months after I first turned my attention to waiting as a means of earning

an honest livelihood, when Trimmer and I, and the butler belonging to the establishment, and a couple of men-servants, borrowed for the great occasion from friends, were all in the dining-room of one of the largest houses in Russell Square.

“It was a grand party, and we were everyone expected to put our best foot foremost.

“Money had been no object, as any person might see at a glance. All the family plate was out; branch candlesticks were on the table and the mantelpiece and the sideboard. The biggest turbot to be had at Billingsgate lay, white and plump and garnished with smelts, before the master of the establishment. I do not know how much the soup smoking in the tureen at the other end had not cost. Down in the kitchen there was almost everything in the way of eatables the tongue of man could name, ready to come on in due course. To the right of the hostess sat a great light in the banking world; to the left of the host, a lady recently married, a grand individual in her way, though less, by reason of lacking a title, than old Lady McQuilton, who, because her dead husband had been a city knight, occupied the place of honour, and was made much of at many of the parties we attended.

“Lady McQuilton was a dreadful old woman,

who ate and drank more than any other woman I ever beheld; but she might have dined out twice a day had she been so minded, and people were always ready to take her home in their carriage or fly, and go out of their way to do it, too.

“As for the bride, I had heard the servants talking about her down in the basement; how she was an only daughter, and her papa had got something the matter with his head, and could never recover; how whatever will he had made could not be altered now, and it was understood everything must come to her; how she had married the son of Alderman Hilkins, in Gower Street, and how it was supposed her money would come in useful to that gentleman.

“A great deal of such talk goes on below stairs, no matter how busy people may be, and I had heard so much of it about men and women for whom I did not care a straw, that, as a rule, what came in at one ear went out of the other.

“Well, as I was saying, we were all in the dining-room; the guests had come downstairs and taken their places; grace had been said by a fat rector who flanked the banker on the hostess's left side. Griggs, the butler, had taken a plate of soup to Lady McQuilton. Trimmer had followed with another, which he placed

before the bride, and I was holding a third plate, into which the banker was solemnly helping a ladleful of the precious liquid, when, happening to glance towards the end of the table, I was stricken with such astonishment I forgot where I stood, and remained utterly unconscious that the banker was regarding me with a perplexed and haughty indignation.

“My trance of amazement could not have lasted more than a couple of seconds, for the lady of the house brought me out of it by smartly tapping me on the sleeve, and frowning in a manner which would once have covered me with confusion.

“But it did not affect me now. There—there—beside the gentleman of the house—there, at the foot of the table—there, worn on the neck of the bride who had married the son of Alderman Hilkins, and whose father was out of whatever mind he may ever have been in, was a star I had last seen amongst Lady Dugdale’s diamonds, when the clerk from Rundell and Bridge’s gave them into my charge at Johnesborough.

“I cannot tell how I got through my part of the dinner service; I fell into no more trances; and elicited no further token of disapproval, I know. After that sharp, angry tap on my coat-sleeve, I pulled myself somehow together, and,

at once alive to the necessity of caution and dissimulation, went through the routine of course after course without mistake or misadventure.

“It was not till after the cloth had been removed, and dessert placed on the table, and the company left to themselves, and we down in the lower regions amongst the *débris* of the dinner, and a confusion of plates, dishes, glasses, pots, pans, knives, forks, and spoons, all dirty, and all out of place—which is simply indescribable—that I even allowed myself to think. I felt afraid to believe what my eyes had beheld; scarcely, indeed, could I credit the evidence of my senses. Lady Dugdale’s famous opal and diamond star pin. Lady Dugdale’s tiara encircling the throat of Alderman Hilkins’ daughter-in-law. The wearer of stolen property sitting in serene unconsciousness of anything being amiss, *vis-à-vis* to Lady McQuilton. That hateful old hag glaring across the dinner-table at jewellery of which she could only vaguely estimate the worth, and that had passed through heaven only knew what quantity of dirty water before clasping Mrs. Hilkins’ un-beautiful throat!

“Altogether the thing was too much for me; the shock too great; not thus had I ever expected to run against My Lady’s diamonds.

Certainly the last thing in my mind was, that I should ever come upon them in the society of solid and respectable and unfashionable city people.

“A nice cool lobby ran the whole width of the basement story, and there, carrying out a chair from the middle of the black ware and crockery, I sat down to ruminate at my leisure. The rest went into the housekeeper’s room to have something to eat in comfort, but I said I could not eat, and should feel glad to be quiet for a bit.

“Trimmer, however, who would as soon have thought of going without his fee as bating one helping of meat or one glass of liquor, and who consequently always rather resented the fact, that even in a usual way I did not care for much eating and drinking when engaged for the evening, soon came to where I sat, and asked me if I was not well.

“Very truthfully I answered I had felt a bit knocked over when the dinner began—‘dazed after a manner for a minute,’ I explained.

“‘Ay,’ he said, ‘that’s because you never will follow my advice. I often wonder you keep up as you do, living on air, as one may say. I was just remarking,’ he added, speaking to the rest, who, under the impression I really was ill, came crowding round me, ‘that if he

would be persuaded to take a toothful of brandy before beginning the evening's duties he'd find himself another man. I can speak for myself. Considering the anxieties and responsibilities I have, if I didn't try to keep myself up a little I'd sink, I know I should.'

" 'Yes,' chimed in the housekeeper, 'there's nothing like keeping yourself up—that's what I always say. And nobody can throw it at me as I preach what I don't practice; wherever I've been I've always stuck to steak and stout, and steak and stout have stood to me, Mr. Trimmer.'

" They went on in this way for a little while, one capping the other's experience, till, as much to get rid of them as anything else, I said I would take just half a glass of brandy and some cold water. Bless you, sir! drinking never was a fault of mine. At a time when gentlemen hardly ever went to bed sober, Mr. Will never took wine to any excess, and I — well, 'like master like man,' says the old proverb.

" When tea and coffee came to be handed round, I went up into the drawing-room with the rest; and got the best look I had yet been able to obtain at Mrs. Hilkins' necklace.

" Yes, it was My Lady's star that seemed to dazzle me, I felt sure; unless there were two in the world as much alike as twins; but this conviction, though it filled my heart with hope and

courage, did not make my way much plainer. I could not accuse a lady of wearing stolen jewels. Had I run across Mr. Charles Sanders, or even his companion, of whom my memory was much less distinct, I should have known what to do. Now I felt myself at sea, and the whole of the long night I tossed and tumbled, fretting myself almost to death.

“The thing seemed so near that I had but to put out my hand to grasp the mystery, and yet if I tried to seize it in too great a hurry it might elude me altogether.

“Next morning I did not go downstairs till I knew Trimmer was off on his rounds. Then I slipped out of the house, and bent my steps towards Mr. Perrin’s office.

“No, sir ; I did not mean to take Mr. Perrin or anybody else into my counsels *then*—it was not my intention to have even the best-meaning people interfering and, perhaps, spoiling my whole game.

“I proposed to try if I could not work out the problem for myself. I was not very clever, I know, but I thought I might be as clever in some things as Mr. Perrin. What I was going to him for was money.

“No matter what turn affairs took, I’d need that, I felt sure—and he was the only person at the minute I cared to ask for ten pounds.

"We had not met since Mr. Will's marriage : but, diamonds or no diamonds, I had no doubt he would lend me what I wanted.

" 'You're changed, Walters,' he said, after he had set me down in the client's chair and looked me over from head to foot, 'you are older and you are thinner, and you are more worn. Why don't you go back to Johnesborough like a sensible fellow? Mr. Pattingham would at once make a berth for you, I know. He often speaks about you; and Mrs. Pattingham has long got over that silly notion that you and the pretended bailiff were in league.'

" 'Begging your pardon, sir, I have a notion when Mrs. Pattingham gets a notion into her head it's not so easy to drive it out again.'

" 'Pooh! She was angry at the time, and no man in his senses ever thinks of attaching any importance to what a woman says when she is in a temper; you take my advice, go back to Johnesborough, and Mrs. Pattingham will be as much pleased to see you as her husband.'

"I could tell by the very way he spoke he was only repeating the words Mr. Will—God bless him—must have used when talking about me, and my heart felt very full, for I had longed often, and often, and often, to look in my dear old master's kindly, handsome face once again, still I only said he was very good, but I did

not think I would go back to Johnesborough for the present, at any rate.

"Standing on the hearthrug with his hands under his coat-tail, Mr. Perrin eyed me compassionately.

"‘Still searching for the Roc’s egg, Walters?’ he enquired.

"Something in his tone nettled me, or would have nettled me if I had not known what I did, so I answered a bit sharp like.

"‘I don’t exactly understand what you mean, sir, but I am still looking after the diamonds.’

"‘Now, Walters, I mean to read you a lecture,’ he said, pleasantly, but still, as if all the while he was thinking what a fool I must be; and then he began and went over all the ground I had travelled often enough backward and forward, heaven knows, proving to his own satisfaction—as I had in the same way, many a time, proved to mine—that there were nine hundred and ninety-nine chances against a thousand, aye, more than that, tale or tidings would ever again be heard of Lady Dugdale’s diamonds.

"‘What chance or probability is there of your running up against a man who calls himself Sanders?’ he asked, by way of a finish.

"‘Not much, I confess,’ I answered, ‘but while there’s life, there’s hope.’

"‘He may be transported or hung?’

“He richly deserves to be either or both, sir.”

“And as for the diamonds, they must have been broken up and scattered to the four winds of heaven long ago.”

“‘It is not impossible,’ I agreed.

“And you mean to tell me you still seriously intend spending more of your best years in this wild-goose chase.”

“‘Yes, sir, I intend to go on for a while longer.’

“‘In the expectation of running up against Sanders?’

“‘Or the other fellow, or—the diamonds,’ I added almost against my will, for I felt then as if I did not care to speak about them.

“He did not say anything for a minute; indeed, it was I who spoke first. I asked him for the money I wanted.

“‘To throw after what you have wasted already.’

“‘If you choose to put it that way—yes, sir. I am not earning very much, and if I wait to write to my father there may be some delay, and——’

“‘A wilful man must have his way,’ finished Mr. Perrin as I stopped and hesitated. He unlocked a drawer, and, taking out some notes, said, ‘Will ten be enough? Have more if you want.’

“‘Quite enough, thank you, sir, for the present.’

“‘Perhaps you would rather have gold?’

“‘If equally convenient—but either will do.’

“I thought he was a long time counting out the gold. While, he was doing so he stopped two or three times to ask a trivial question, or make some simple remark; but at last he pushed over ten guineas.

“‘See that it is right,’ he said.

“Without lifting the pieces from the table I did as he told me.

“‘Quite right, sir, and I am much obliged, I said, looking up at him.

“Then to my astonishment, before I could gather up the money, he laid his hand flat on mine, and stooping forward, said almost in a whisper:

“‘Walters, you have got on the track at last.’

“I was so amazed I fell back in my chair and looked at him open-mouthed.

“‘What have you heard, sir?’ I managed to get out at last.’

“‘Nothing. I only know what your own manner tells me. No, I am not pumping for information. If you want to hold your tongue, hold it. If you want help say so, and I will give it.’

“‘Sir,’ I answered. I was trembling so much I could scarcely get out the words, ‘I have got on the track, I think, but I can’t be sure yet. I do want to hold my tongue till I know more, or find I can’t get to know more. I am not in need of help at the present time; and oh, Mr. Perrin, you won’t say a word about this to a living soul—till I say you may. There is just life, so to speak, in the spark of light I see, and a breath might put it out.’

“‘Trust to my absolute silence,’ he answered. ‘The only word more I will say in the matter now, don’t let lack of money stop the road to discovery. If you can put the saddle on the right horse it will be a great relief to us all;’ which remark I took to mean that though, as my father had told me, Mrs. Pattingham and my master were reconciled, Mr. Will had still the feeling, he like myself would never be quite satisfied unless Charles Sanders and his friends could be found and induced to open their mouths.

“Somehow I went out into the streets happier after that talk with Mr. Perrin. I need stand idle for no help he could give me, and I had often felt sad and lonely in my long solitary quest in search of Lady Dugdale’s diamonds.

“That same afternoon I ~~went~~ to a place Mr.

Griggs frequented. By the greatest good fortune I found him talking to the landlord.

“‘Hope I see you better, Walters,’ he said cordially, and then, over a glass of something comfortable, we got into conversation about different things, amongst others the last evening’s dinner party, and the guests assembled round his master’s table.

“‘That was a handsome necklace the bride wore,’ I said with a carelessness I was very far from feeling. ‘I don’t know much about such things myself, but I should imagine if real it must be worth a few pounds.’

“‘I should say so,’ answered Mr. Griggs, balancing his portly figure on his toes. ‘I should say so,’ he repeated, bringing his weight down on his heels. ‘Bless you!’ he went on, when he had concluded these exertions, and once more addressed himself to the tumbler you may be very sure I was not slow to replenish. ‘That ornament is genuine enough. At the shop it came out of they knew good stones from bad.’

“‘Why, where do you suppose she bought it?’ I asked in amazement. His tone was so positive, that for a moment it almost shook my own settled convictions.

“‘I don’t suppose she bought it anywhere—and what’s more, I haven’t a notion where it

may have been bought originally,' he replied, evidently enjoying my mystification. 'All I say, and all I mean, is that at the place I expect it came out of, you may take your oath there is not much but what's full value for what is given for it.'

"What place are you talking about?' I asked, a little irritably. I was too anxious to bear his maundering with the patience I ought to have shown; but he did not appear to notice my impatience, he only answered:

"Her pa's, to be sure. She calls him "papa." Lord—Lord'—and Mr. Griggs bent his robust form double, and laughed silently.

"I said solemnly, 'If you don't tell me this minute who Mrs. Hilkins' father is, I'll punch your head.'

"No need to do that,' he replied, 'why shouldn't I tell you—I daresay you know him well—may be you have had transactions with the worthy gentleman. Oh! he is or was a celebrated character, one time or another; he has had most of the reputations and jewels of the nobility in his keeping. Did you never hear of Saul Hiram?'

"What, the pawnbroker?'

"Oh! dear no, not a pawnbroker, a silver smith, dealer in precious stones, kind, feeling sort

of person expectant heirs and ladies out of cash were glad to go to. There were three balls up over a side passage to be sure, but anybody might have three balls.'

"'And you mean seriously to say Alderman Hilkins' son is married to that old scoundrel's daughter?'

"He nodded.

"'And you suppose her jewels came from his establishment?'

"'Sure of it—and the lace—did you notice the lace?'

"'No, I can't say that I did.'

"'Brussels, Walters—Brussels, every thread of it; and Miss Florence, the lady's maid in our house assures me "pitchforked on the woman's dress"—Miss Florence's own words, sir—and worth its weight in golden guineas ten times counted.'

"'Well, this is a queer notion,' I exclaimed.

"'Queer, you may say that,' agreed Mr. Griggs readily, 'pon my honour, now, it is not a match I should have cared to make myself, though I suppose I am as free from vulgar prejudices as most. And for the Hilkinses too, to drop into such a connection. People you would have thought above anything of the kind; for though not rich, not able to lay bank-note beside bank-note with us, still most respectable,

anyone might have said. The whole thing amuses you, I see. Take a drop more to brace you up a bit, you are not quite yourself yet.'

"'No, I am not,' I answered, wondering at the time when I ever was likely to be.

"'Come now,' said Mr. Griggs, as I stood silent, considering in what way I was to get this extraordinary tangle unravelled, 'you have been accustomed to mix in good society. You have seen, I consider, pretty nearly as much of high life as myself. Didn't it at once strike you last night, that Mrs. Hilkins wasn't exactly, that is to say, she wants an air, eh?'

"Most truthfully I might have answered that it struck me all the people I saw gathered round the festive board wanted 'an air,' and a great many other good things besides; but I refrained from saying so, and merely answered, 'I had looked more at the lady's jewels than at herself.'

"'Well, certainly,' he conceded, 'the jewels were better worth looking at than the lady.'

"'Where does Mr. Hilkins live,' I asked.

"'He's living at old Hiram's place down at Clapton,' said Griggs. 'By what I can hear, he has let himself in for a nice disappointment, or at least a long wait. He was courting the daughter, and everything was arranged for, the marriage portion settled and all, when the mother takes it into her head to die. That

delayed matters a bit, then the match came on the carpet again, and the father goes off his head. Well, so far as I can gather, young Hilkins thought if he once secured Miss Hiram, he would be master in the old man's shoes; but he was no sooner married than he found out the difference. Whether it is the trustees, or the Lord Chancellor, or Hiram's relations, I cannot say, all I do know is, he can't handle a penny of the money.'

"'What business is he in?' I enquired.

"'Something in the silk trade; has an office in Norton Folgate. Bless me! I had no notion it was so late; how time does slip away in agreeable company to be sure.'

"Time had not slipped away so fast as to prevent my still standing a chance of finding Mr. Hilkins in the City, and to Norton Folgate I accordingly proceeded with such haste that I caught my gentleman just as he was preparing for departure.

"While Griggs was talking, a notion had come into my head, and I determined at once to try if anything could be made of using it. Stout as I am now sir, you would not readily believe I was once a slim, good-looking fellow, a man who carried, as somebody said, 'a letter of recommendation in his face.' I had lived, too, all my life amongst gentlefolks and people who

were well-bred and well-mannered, and so knew what was what, and for these reasons, I thought I would try a chance shot at the Hilkins' covey. If it did not hit anything I should not be worse off, so I went boldly into the office, and asked if I could see Mr. Hilkins.

"'What's your name?' said the clerk I spoke to.

"'Thomas Walters.'

"'And what's your business?'

"'I have come to apply for the post of butler in his establishment.'

"For aught I knew Mr. Hilkins might have kept a dozen butlers, but it so happened he had none, and had not thought about supplying himself with such a luxury. However, my visit proved precisely what showing a beautiful silk to a lady does so often. It set him considering whether he didn't want the thing offered.

"Further, he was, as I found out afterwards, such a snob, he felt pleased his clerks should hear a butler ask for a situation, for both of which reasons he gave orders for me to be sent into his private office.

"He asked me a great many questions, amongst others whether he had not seen me before. I said, yes; that I had had the honour of waiting at the house where he dined on the previous evening, and that I thought if he was not suited

I should like to serve him. I told him where I had lived, and I at once perceived if anything got me the situation it would be the fact of having been butler to Lord Dugdale's nephew.

"I mentioned that before his marriage I acted as valet to the Honorable Mr. Pattingham, and added, any one of the family who might chance to be in London would speak for me, as I was known to them all.

"While I was saying this, I heard Mr. Hilkins murmuring, 'By Jove,' 'Capital notion,' 'Excellent chance,' 'Wonder what Bicton would think;' Bicton, as I afterwards found out, being a gentleman with whom he was running a race in the way of keeping up appearances.

"I had much ado to hide my disgust when he enquired if I could drive.

"'He'll be wanting to know next if I can hoe potatoes, and hang out the family wash,' I considered, but I answered that when necessary, I could drive, and that though I had never been in the stables either at the Earl's or his nephew's, I knew all about horses.

"'Come along then, said Mr. Hilkins, and I'll show you as pretty a tit as you need ever wish to lay eyes on.'

"As he spoke, he led the way through the office, slashing his boot with a cutting whip, while

he swaggered towards the door, in front of which an ostler from some adjoining livery yard was walking a horse up and down.

"It was not a bad looking hack—dark bay with black legs, small head, good neck, short back, no vice about the eyes, a clean, round useful sort of animal.

"‘There,’ says Mr. Hilkins, with a proud smile. ‘what do you think of that?’

"‘He’s a stiff little horse,’ I answered, ‘and I daresay can go.’

"‘Go,’ repeated the ostler, taking a morsel of straw out of his mouth to speak more plainly, ‘like the wind; and you should see him jump.’

"‘It’s wonderful what clever fencers some of that build turn out,’ I replied, thinking at the minute of a cob Mr. Will, when he was a lad, had taken over leaps hunters did not care for.

"‘I have contracted an extraordinary fancy for him,’ said Mr. Hilkins. ‘If he’s all I believe, I shall buy him.’

"Till that moment it never occurred to me Mr. Hilkins did not own the animal he admired so much, and I am quite unable to tell why, when I heard his words, I turned and looked at the ostler. He looked back at me perfectly straight, with righteousness and innocence beaming from his eyes, and shining all

over his countenance; any one might have sworn he had never even heard of a single stable trick, or was up to a solitary dodge in the way of passing a screw off as sound.

"Not to weary you, sir, he looked at me too straight. I had seen the same sort of look and man before, and felt sure there was something the matter with the horse.

"Does he go well in harness?' I asked, just by way of saying something.

"Like a lamb,' said the ostler.

"Seems to have been a bit of a pet too,' I remarked, noticing the creature was poking his nose about my pockets as if after bread. 'I wonder his master liked to part with him.'

"Couldn't help it,' was the reply—'fell bankrupt—broke up.'

"Why, I understood Mr. Torison to say he was dead,' exclaimed Mr. Hilkins.

"That was the owner of the other, sir—the roan, the one you didn't take to—not to be compared to this little fellow,' and he patted the cob's neck.

"Meantime I had seen something I didn't understand. As we stood the light fell on the horse's fore legs, and showed on one of them a patch of dirt.

"It's a pity he has been down,' I said, at last having made up my mind what it meant.

“‘Down!’ repeated the ostler, scornfully, ‘he ain’t been down.’

“‘What do you mean—what are you talking about?’ asked Mr. Hilkins in a hurry.

“‘That horse has been down I answered.’ ‘I hope, sir,’ I went on, ‘you will pardon my making so free as to advise you, but I wouldn’t ride him if I was you till the matter is settled, otherwise it might be thought you had thrown him.’

“After that there ensued a little fast talk between me and the ostler; he said I was a fine one to pretend to know anything about horse flesh. I told him I knew as much about horse flesh as he did—that the cob’s knee was broken—that he had put black upon the place, and the dust as they came along had settled on the grease. Then we went to the training yard, and we had it all over again. However, Mr. Hilkins did not ride that horse home or ever see him again.

“Instead, he engaged me as butler, subject to references, and before the week was out, the same roof covered me and some of My Lady’s diamonds.

“Three months passed, three of the longest months I ever remember, and I seemed no nearer the truth than when I went to Clapton. I did not want to spoil everything by over-

haste, yet there were times when I felt as if I could endure the delay and anxiety no longer.

"I did not see the diamonds again. From something I heard from the housemaid I gathered Mrs. Hilkins was not going to wear much jewellery as long as her father lived, because it might lead to unpleasantness with one of the trustees, who had not liked the match. I could not ascertain if she had more diamonds. They lived pretty close, and I do not think were very well off. It was a terribly stupid hum-drum sort of life we all led, though the master and mistress were both kind enough. As for me I could do just as I liked—if I had wanted to rob the house, I might have done it over and over again.

"But I did not want to steal the diamonds; all I desired to know was how they came to be there; that Mr. Hilkins knew nothing about the place they came from I felt satisfied, and, so far as I could gather, the men at old Hiram's shop had never seen them.

"On and on I waited, each night determining to take Mr. Perrin into my confidence; and then each morning I thought I would see if no light was thrown upon the matter during the course of the day.

"One afternoon I went into the city with Mrs. Hilkins' watch—it wanted cleaning, or she had

broken the spring or something,—at all events I was to take the watch to Hiram, jeweller and silversmith, and bring back another while hers was being repaired.

“I liked to go to this shop, for the manager talked to me about the old man and his doings, and I always hoped I might hear some news.

“Mr. Hilkins was to dine out, and my mistress said she should only have a cup of tea, so I did not need to hurry, and I stayed in the shop chatting best part of an hour.

“I had got the other watch, and was just on the point of leaving when a man came into one of the boxes that ran along the back part of the shop, admission to them being gained by a side entrance, and asked if he could speak to Mr. Hiram.

“That voice! I should have recognized it among ten thousand; my heart gave such a leap I felt as if I were suffocating; I could not move. Where I stood it was impossible to see me from the boxes, yet I was able to hear every word that passed. ‘Mr. Hiram was never at business. He could see the manager if he liked.’

“Mr. Charles Sanders spoke again: Where did Mr. Hiram live? No other person could attend to the business on which he came.

“The assistant refused to give Mr. Hiram’s

address ; and, while the discussion was at its height, I slipped out of the shop and waited in the street till my friend should appear.

"I pulled my hat down over my eyes and my coat collar up about the lower part of my face, and spoke as gruff as I could, when he came out at last and I asked :

" ' Well, did you get it ? ' "

" ' Get what ? ' he said, angrily.

" ' Old Hiram's address. I thought may be they wouldn't tell you, and I know it. ' "

" ' Oh you do, do you ? ' "

" ' Yes, he's off his head, and in a private asylum ! ' "

" ' The devil he is ! ' "

"I kept myself well in the shade while he thought out whatever was in his mind.

" ' He has no son, ' he said, after a while.

" ' He has a daughter, ' I answered.

" ' Where does she live ? ' "

"I told him, and then he thanked me and offered to stand something to drink.

"All this time I had been trying to decide what I ought to do. I was in such a state of terror and excitement I felt as if strength were gone totally out of my body. Mr. Sanders alone I should have known how to grapple with, but Mr. Sanders in conjunction with Hiram caused such doubts to arise in my confused

mind, that while I deliberated I lost the chance presented by fortune.

"As I answered Sanders' offer, and stepped forward with the intention of seizing him, I must either have dropped into my natural voice, or else he saw something that frightened him, for he was off like a shot. I followed for a minute, but he out-ran me, doubling and turning through lanes and alleys I knew nothing about.

"You may be sure I went back to Clapton a good deal crestfallen, and more inclined than ever to go the next day to Mr. Perrin, but when morning came I thought I had waited a good while, and I would wait a little longer. He would come to Mr. Hilkins' I felt sure, and then I determined he should not escape me again.

"But he did not come to Mr. Hilkins. Days went by, and weeks too, for I saw no more of Mr. Charles Sanders.

"Still I did not go to Mr. Perrin, for the stream was now running so fast it seemed to me it must be nearing the sea of discovery.

"Mrs. Hilkins all at once changed completely, she grew moody in her manner and secret in her ways. She went out at odd hours, plainly dressed and closely veiled. She was irritable to her husband. She never sent me again to Hiram's, either for her watch, or on any other

errand. Nothing I did could please her; she was so continually finding fault that if it had not suited my own purpose to stay on, she would have forced me to give notice, but as I did not do that, she at last told her husband to get rid of me.

"I never knew exactly what she said; but he came to me one morning all in a hurry, and bid me pack up my things and leave the house at once.

"I had been expecting this, and yet when it came I could not tell any one how I felt.

"For a minute I thought of insisting on seeing Mrs. Hilkins in his presence, and letting him know everything, but I did not like to make mischief between them, so I only said, 'Very well, sir.'

"He had evidently expected a scene, and was comforted by the respect of my manner.

"'You understand, Walters, I have no fault to find with you,' he explained.

"'I perfectly understand that, sir,' I answered.

"'Only Mrs. Hilkins thinks we can do without a butler.'

"'Yes, sir.'

"'She fancies she should prefer having only female servants in the house.'

"'Many ladies do, sir,' I said.

"From Clapton I went straight to Mr. Perrin, and told him my story

"He was very angry with me, and declared he did not see what was to be done, but that was all talk, of course, because before an hour had passed he was on his way to Mr. Hilkins' office, with old Hiram's lawyer.

"They cared little whether he knew the history of the diamonds or not.

"'It is to him we must go, Walters,' said Mr. Perrin, 'I have no intention of dealing with the wife alone.'

"As it turned out Mr. Hilkins had not the faintest suspicion of there being anything wrong. He was an honest man, and so shocked at what Mr. Perrin told him he did not lose a moment in trying to set the matter right.

"My Lady got her diamonds sooner than we caught Mr. Charles Sanders, whom it seemed Mrs. Hilkins had been trying to buy off for the sake of her father's good name.

"Even now it goes sorely against my grain to think of that scoundrel being let off scot free as he was, in order that old Hiram's connection with the matter might be hushed up.

"So far as the truth was ever known, a brother of one of the clerks at Rundell and Bridge's got wind about the resetting of the diamonds, and he and Sanders and the man who pledged the jewels planned the robbery among them.

"Sanders declared old Hiram took the dia-

monds in good faith, but as his books were searched and no record of the transaction found in them, Mr. Perrin had his own ideas on the subject.

“There can be no question he meant eventually to break them up, for he took them home and locked them away, and nobody would ever have heard tale or tiding of My Lady’s diamonds if he had kept sane.

“‘I should have liked to know all the ins and outs of the matter,’ added Mr. Walters, ‘because I did not believe one half of what that Sanders said, whose name was not Sanders at all but Pilk, and who had been in prison for another offence all the time I was breaking my heart looking for him; but as Mr. Hiram never recovered, and there was no one else to throw any light on the matter, I can only feel thankful to remember My Lady’s eyes were opened at last.

“‘Even to this day she is always thinking what she can do to make amends for what she calls her injustice, and as for his Lordship—but there, sir, I’ll say no more except this—that amongst high or low, rich or poor, I never met the equal of my dear old master, Mr. Will.”

FAR STRANGER THAN FICTION.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. CALCEY'S NARRATIVE.

THE most terrible day in all my life was that on which they brought my husband home dead.

It was a lovely morning; the sky was blue, and the sun shone down on the canal and the rushes, among which the ducklings were bobbing in and out. The fields were yellow with buttercups; the larks were singing fit to burst their little throats; the hawthorn was in full flower, and scented all the land. It was a cheery morning, and everybody was in good heart but me.

An hour ago I had been cheery too; exchanging friendly words with the neighbours as they passed, gathering our water-cresses the while, and going up to the fence to pay my duty to the ladies walking along the lane,

who knew me and stopped to say a kindly good-day when they saw what I was doing.

It all comes back to me as this is being set down in writing—the green of the earth; the blue of the sky; the soft flow of the water; the little swish and scurry of the ducklings darting after flies, rushing under the bank when strangers came in sight; the glory of sunlight that lay across the land, over the fields, over the wild flowers—what a wealth of wild flowers grow along that strip of waste land beside the towing-path!—over the water, over the dark pine-woods in the distance, and the blue hills in the further distance still.

Before going out to gather the cresses, I had stood for a minute in the little porch before our door, looking at all these things, and thinking what a happy woman I was. I envied no one; not the squire's daughters, riding past on their slim-legged horses; not Mrs. Grainger, wife of the great miller, as she drove by in her open carriage drawn by a pair of beautiful bays; not the young gentlemen rowing up the water in their gaily-painted boats; no, not a creature in all the world. I had a good home, a good husband, four healthy children; the prettiest garden, in a humble way, of any in the whole neighbourhood; such a dear little house, which it

was my pride as much as my pleasure to keep bright as a new pin: I was still under thirty, and I had good health, and had tried to do my duty all my life; and I felt happy, ay, happier perhaps than the Queen on her throne.

And it was most likely just at that minute my husband died!

I had not been long out in the garden, and, what with one interruption and another, I had not gathered many cresses, when I heard the sound as of some one running like mad down our lane. I lifted my head to look, for the bonnet was tilted over my eyes to keep the sun out of them; but before I could well see who was coming, Steve Henton, a young lad that lodged with us, had lifted the latch of the gate and stood beside me.

I opened my mouth to ask why he did not shut the gate after him, but the first look at his face stopped the words on my lips.

It was not pale, it was white. He was panting for breath, and the perspiration was dripping from his forehead.

"For the Lord's sake," I cried, "what has happened!"

"Your man," he said, "is badly hurt! They are bringing him here, and I am off

for the doctor!" And before I could ask how Ben had got hurt, or which way they were bringing him home, he was out of the gate and flying along the road again.

God help me! I must have stood dazed for a bit, I think. When I came quite to myself (I really do believe people can faint standing) the sun did not shine so bright, the sky did not look so blue, the rushes did not stand out so distinct as they had done before. In a minute, in a second, I had passed from youth to age. Since that time I have loved the blue in the sky and welcomed the sunshine; while I live in this beautiful world, it will always, I think, seem beautiful to me; but the sunshine can never be exactly what it was of old; I can never again look up into the clear vault of heaven with the same untroubled heart I had of yore.

"Your man is badly hurt." Yes, that was what Steve had said.

Badly hurt—my man, my Ben! I ran into the lane, and looked up the canal and down the canal, and over the fields that lay on the opposite bank, like one distraught. I did not know which way to go. Steve had come down the lane, but that told me nothing. I ran first a few steps towards the mill, and then a few in the other direction; and then

I shaded my eyes with my hand, and strained them over the meadows yellow with buttercups, looking if I could see aught coming between the tall grass along the field-path.

If they had been working up near the junction, the field-path would be the likeliest way, and in the far, far distance, I did see something dark moving slowly, slowly. I was so sure, that I set off up to the foot-bridge over the water; but before I got there, just at the bend of the lane, I saw some men carrying a burden.

It was Ben. I ran to meet them. I flew over the ground; I felt as if my feet never touched the earth. They stopped when they saw me, and one said—

“He is badly hurt, Nell.”

He was lying on a hurdle, and one arm and hand had fallen over the edge of it. I pressed among them and took hold of that hand. Then they tell me—I don’t remember anything about it myself—that I gave an awful scream, and, crying out, “Hurt—he’s dead!” fell all in a heap at the feet of the man who had spoken to me.

After that I was very ill. When I got a bit strong again, and able to sit up in bed with a pillow at my back, the funeral was over, and the house dreadfully still and quiet.

The children had been sent out of the way, and my mother was with me; and there was no Ben, no husband, on earth any more. We had never been cross nor snappish to one another; he was the best man girl ever married; he had kissed me that morning before he went away to his work, and I lay and cried when I remembered that parting till I thought my very heart would break.

But mother only said, "Cry all you can, my poor Nell—it'll do thee good!" for I had been out of my head for many days, and then a hard callous sort of way came over me, and I seemed to feel no more than if I had been turned to stone. So she was thankful at last to see the tears come, though they seemed to tear at my life-strings as they fell.

When I was well enough to walk across the kitchen, she holding me—for I kept weak as a child—and sit in an easy-chair placed in front of the door, the grass in the meadows was all cut and the hay carried, and cattle were grazing where the buttercups had been; and there lay a blue haze over the further landscape, that looked like a thin veil hung between us and the pinewoods in the distance. Behind our cottage wheat was growing; and the ears were already full, and the grain

ripe, and the harvest quite ready for the reaper.

But Ben would never see earthly grain nor human reaper more. I had cried all my tears, or I should have wept when I crept out into the sunshine once again. There were the flowers his hands had planted, the scarlet-runners he had sown, the potatoes he had earthed up, the roses he had trained—but where was he? There was not a bush in the garden but recalled some memory of the dead. The very click of the latch on the gate I associated with his outgoing and his incoming.

It seemed to me as if he could not have gone for ever; as if he must return, and come whistling down the lane and crunch the gravel under his feet as he came up the walk; and shout, "Hillo! Why, Jimmy! why, Susy!" as the children ran to meet him, and clasped him round the knees and shrieked with delight because "Daddy had got home."

I had no tears left to shed, and there was no wicked bitterness in my grief, thank God. I was sad and lonely and weak, but not desperate, when I lay back in the old easy-chair, with the flowers round and about me, and the air full of all sweet scents, and mother sitting close at hand and shelling beans for supper.

Whether it was my fancy or the way the light fell, I do not know, but it struck me all at once she had aged greatly since Ben's death.

What a mother she was ! What a wife she had been ! through what troubles she struggled to bring up her children respectably ! Poor father was not a man like Ben. Often as not he never brought home a farthing of his wages. He was a good workman, but he drank himself out of one situation after another ; and when at last he fell ill, she had to nurse him and keep him, all out of her own hard earnings, and finally bury him too with the money she made by washing for a few of the gentry round and about. I thought of all this as I looked at her worn patient face bent down over the beans, at her thin brown hands hardened with the honest labour of years, at her plain stuff gown, at the snowy handkerchief folded across her bosom ; and my heart reproached me for all the anxiety my illness must have caused her ; for having thought so much of my own trouble that I had never considered the sorrow I must be giving her.

"Mother," I said at last.

She looked up as I spoke, and, setting the basin into which she was shelling the beans

upon the ground, she rose and came nearer, thinking I wanted my pillows moved or the shawl wrapped closer round me.

It is well mothers want no wages, or some of us could never even begin to pay them what we owe!

When she bent over me I could not speak; I could only take her hand and rub it against my cheek.

"Poor Nell—poor girl!" said the unselfish old soul softly. "You wanted something, did you not, dear?"

I was still so weak that I could not well speak for a minute. I motioned her back to her seat, and, after she had taken the basin into her lap and a fresh handful of beans out of the basket, I asked the question I wanted to put before.

"How are we going to live, mother?"

She looked up surprised; then answered, "Somehow, please God, Nell. What you have to do now is to get strong, and not to trouble your head about money and suchlike."

If a man had come in then to rob or wreck the place, I could not have found strength enough even to say him nay; so I lay back in my chair and looked at the flowers, and thought—no, what I did could scarcely be called thinking.

"If it is any comfort to you," said my mother at last, pausing with a bean in her hand to turn towards me, "we have not wanted for anything yet, and I don't think it likely we shall. Mr. Stannard came down here and gave me five sovereigns with his own hand; they got up a subscription among the men, and the gentry were not behind-hand either. Ben was buried as I thought you would like him to be. After a fashion, no gentleman could have been better seen to. I wanted to pay Dr. Ranger; but he would not take a halfpenny. He said you and Ben paid him honest while you could pay, and he was not going to charge you anything. Beef-tea has been sent from The Grange, and there is not a farthing of rent owing; so rest content, girl."

Ah, mother, mother! and you in your bitterest extremity had no subscription—no man helped you—you paid your doctor. And I—O, what a poor weak creature I seemed!

It might have been ten days after this that we resumed the conversation.

She began it.

"Nell!"

"Yes, mother."

I was ever so much better.

"You remember asking how we were to live?"

I nodded assent.

"Do you think you are well enough to talk about that now?"

"I think so. I feel quite strong—that is, I am getting to feel stronger."

"I know, dear. Well, the way things stand is this: I think I must try to keep a home together, and you take a place."

All the blood in my body seemed to drop back into my heart as she spoke. You see, ladies and gentlemen, "home is home, be it ever so homely," and I had loved my home—not as much as I had loved my husband, but very truly also.

"Can't we manage anyhow?" I gasped out.

"I am afraid not, dear," said my mother. "All the little money you had by you, all the little money I had by me, is gone. There is rent to pay, there are four small children to keep. The family is leaving The Grange, and the people who are coming will keep a laundry-maid. Then, though I am hearty now, I may not be hearty for ever. While I have my health we might manage; but when you get strong, I think we ought to look the worst in the face."

I could not say a word. Indeed I don't think I had a word to say.

"You see, Nell," went on my mother, "I

am willing to do all I can, and more; but if the work stops—and it is stopping, for the family at The Grange far more than pay my rent—what are we to do? It is hard upon you, I know, girl; still—”

I put out my hand and stopped her saying another word.

“Mother, it was only for a minute. I will do whatever you think best.”

All my life I had done what she thought best, and I was not going to grieve her loving heart with objecting now.

“That’s my brave Nell,” she said; and she got up and kissed me, which was quite a rare thing for mother to do. “Mrs. Warford and I have been talking the matter over” (Mrs. Warford was housekeeper at The Grange), “and she says what you must do is to get to know where your last mistress is living now, so that you may refer to her. Of course as to character, anybody about here would speak to that; but if you go as maid, it is not likely a lady would take you unless she knew what you could do. She thinks Mrs. Hume’s sister, Lady Poplett, wants a maid, and she would speak for you.”

My eyes travelled round the garden. Ah, me! ah, me!

“I want to say something more to you,”

went on my mother. "It is just the same to me whether I keep on this house or my own; which shall it be, Nell?"

There comes a time when women are unselfish; but it is never towards their mothers, I think. At any rate, I was not unselfish then towards mine.

She loved her little, trim cottage, and I knew she did; and yet I stretched out my hands towards her deprecatingly.

"He laid the water on to the beds," I said, "and it is only ten shillings a year the canal people charge us; and he planted the rose-trees and all the bushes——"

I could not go on; if I had been able, there was no need. She just crept round my chair and said—

"Poor Nell, poor girl! The good God will help my child!"

She had been through much rougher waters, and yet come safe to land; so she knew.

CHAPTER II.

STILL MRS. CALCEY.

WHILE I was single I lived as own maid with a lady of the name of Mason. Before I went to her I was servant to her

mother, and called "parlour-maid;" but, indeed, I did most of the work of the house, for we had never, to say, a regular cook till a few months before Miss Emily's wedding.

I never was much attached to either my mistress or her daughter. The first Mrs. Wilkins, was a mean, clever, managing, manœuvring woman; she could make a sixpence go further than any person I ever saw; and there was not a shift of economy but she knew and practised. The reason we had no regular cook was because there chanced to be so little to cook. Miss could not have dressed so well, and missus could not have afforded her stiff black silks, if the larder had been fairly well filled. No one would credit upon how little money that house was kept. I could tell stories about the meals there, which would almost, to those unaccustomed to such scraping and pinching, seem incredible.

Why did I stop, you want to know. Well, I was young, and I never cared much about eating. As for beer, I could not bear the sight or smell of it at that time. For my age, my wages were good. I had known at home many a time what it was to go hungry to bed; and the money I got was such a help to mother. My clothes did not cost me much, for Miss Emily gave me many a dress she had

cast off. Besides, Mrs. Wilkins taught me everything I knew: how to wait at table; how to answer the door properly, and announce visitors; how to make good coffee and salads, and toss up little dishes; for I had gone to her from a farmhouse, where I learned no more than my mother had instructed me to do at home.

So, although I was not, to say, fond of either Mrs. Wilkins or Miss Emily, I should have felt it hard to go to another situation; and when one morning my mistress said she meant to have a woman in to help with the rough work, I could only manage to get out that I was very willing to do everything she wanted, and I hoped she had no reason to find fault with me.

"No, no, Briart," she answered (my maiden name was Briart, and they never called me Ellen). "I am going to try to do better for you if I can. You are clever with your needle, and I want you to take a few lessons in millinery and hairdressing, so that if some day Miss Emily should want a lady's-maid you can fill the situation. You have been a very good girl, and you have seen shortness with us; and if better times come, it is only fair you should share in them."

I did not know what she meant then, but

before many days were over I began to suspect she hoped to get Miss Emily married.

A gentleman began to come often to the house. For the first time I was parlour-maid in real earnest.

I had also to trim and alter and make Miss Emily's dresses—things she had always before done for herself.

Sometimes there was a person had in to cook the dinner, and every day a charwoman was ordered to blacklead and scrub and scour, and do all the things that had kept my hands rough, and made them sometimes look not so clean as I should have liked.

He was a young gentleman who came, and very rich, we soon found out. I should not have cared for him much myself, and I am sure Miss Emily did not; but her mamma was set upon the match, and whatever Mrs. Wilkins set her mind upon was bound to be carried out sooner or later.

It was she made all the love, and not the young gentleman or Miss Emily. Nothing was too good for him. She made him think that every word he spoke was wiser and funnier and different from any word ever spoken by anybody before. Sometimes when I was waiting at table or taking up tea I used to turn hot all over at the bare-

faced way she flattered him, and the untruths she told.

I thought he must find her out; that no man in any station could be such a simpleton as not to see what she wanted.

But he did not. He thought himself very sharp and clever, and perhaps he was in some ways; but she was sharper and cleverer. He always said no one could take him in; but she did. He was vain to an extent, and she played upon his vanity. So far as I could make out he had not many friends, or indeed any friends, and no one could wonder at it; for he was ill-bred and conceited, and selfish and domineering—a person no lady could have loved, or gentleman chosen for his companion.

He was not good-tempered either: he had peevish fits and sullen fits, and jealous fits and angry fits; but Mrs. Wilkins bore with him through them all. If she had been a saint she could not have showed a better nature than she did when humouring his contrariness.

He was greatly taken with her. He would have her to live with him and Miss Emily after the marriage. The nice dinners and little dishes pleased him, cook said, and I have no doubt she was right; for I never saw a

gentleman so fond of eating, and who drove such a fuss about it, as Mr. Mason.

And he was equally greedy as regards wine. My mistress bought some very good and very expensive, and told him it was a part of a purchase made by her poor dear husband.

"You know, Mr Mason," she said "Emily and I never touch wine" (that was quite true for they could not afford it); "and so we have only used a bottle or so, now and then, when we wanted to give our best to a *particular* friend."

It suited him very well indeed to come to a house where the ladies ate little and drank nothing. All the more was left for him; and he used to let himself be helped to every scrap of a favourite dish, and finish the last drop in a decanter, as if there was no one in all the world to be considered except Harlesdon Mason, Esquire.

I never did believe he was very fond of Miss Emily; but he was very fond of her mamma. He could have done, I fancy, without the young lady, but he could not do without the house. He liked the easy-chairs and the warm fires, and the snug meals, and the good wine and the old brandy, and the flattery, and the absence of all restraint, and the way

he was made of and welcomed, and coddled up and fussed over.

Goodness! If only his finger ached, the doctor had to be sent for immediately. Any one might have thought Mrs. Wilkins was his mother, the way she went on about his health.

He was not strong ("not likely to be, always eating and drinking," said cook), and the doctor told him he must be very careful, and avoid exertion and keep his mind quiet.

"And I know you couldn't be in better hands," finished the doctor, meaning Mrs. Wilkins' hands.

The best friends, however, may quarrel sometimes, and Mrs. Wilkins and he had a quarrel once, when I thought all was over, and that Miss Emily would be left in the lurch.

It was something about the settlements. Miss Emily stayed in her room and cried, and Mrs. Wilkins' temper was so bad, cook vowed she would never come into the house again; and the charwoman was sent off at a minute's notice, and I did not know what to do.

However, Mr. Mason gave in (the wedding clothes had been bought, and everything arranged, and a day named for the wedding, before the quarrel); and he signed whatever it was Mrs. Wilkins' lawyers wanted him to sign. I dressed Miss Emily on the marriage-morning;

and when they came back from church she was Mrs. Mason, and he looked sulky, and she frightened.

It was not a happy marriage; it might have been unhappier, only that Mr. Mason took ill a few months after they returned from the wedding-tour, and, though everything was done for him that could be done, he died within the year.

No person could have had more attention or better care. He never seemed to give up completely till he ceased to relish his food. Before that, it appeared to us all as if he might linger on for years; but quite suddenly he took a distaste to chicken and fish and jellies and grapes and beef-tea; then he began to loathe the sight and smell of wines and spirits. A little lemonade, a small quantity of bread-and-milk, these and such like were the only things he would touch. One day the doctor said something to him about arranging his affairs, but he answered they were all settled long before.

"My wife will have everything she can want during her lifetime," he explained, "which is surely enough for any woman."

After that, however, Mrs. Wilkins wanted him to make a will; but all he said in answer was,

"There is no need to leave her more than the law will give her and my own folly has already given her. I shall sign nothing for the lawyers to fight over after I am gone. Hal ought to have a chance now. I wish I had done something for him sooner."

I heard it all. I was in the room well-nigh constantly, but they never minded me.

My master seemed to like my being about him. Once he said to Mrs. Wilkins,

"Briart has been a good girl. I should like her to have something."

"How much?" asked my old mistress. She did not say, "How kind, how noble, how generous!" in those days, as she had done before the marriage.

He thought a minute, and answered, "Ten pounds."

"Very well, I will take care she has it," agreed Mrs. Wilkins; but he did not seem satisfied.

"I will give it to her myself now," he declared; and they had to fetch him his purse and open it, and let him put the money in my hand, before he rested content.

"You will send some of it to your mother, I know," he said to me, looking up in my face with a weary smile. "Ah, had mine lived!"

Now I never thought he had heard any-

thing about poor mother till then, and it seemed strange in any case he should think of her; but many things were strange about him. In the evenings, when Mrs. Wilkins and his wife were at dinner, he would tell me about the pranks he had played when he was a boy stopping at his uncle's, and speak of a young cousin called Hal.

"I served him a scurvy trick I am afraid," he said, "once; but it might have been worse. You'll tell him, won't you, it might have been worse?"

I said I would if ever I saw the gentleman; but before I had finished saying so he wandered off again. Towards the last he was light-headed more than half his time.

Somehow that ten pounds made a coolness between me and Mrs. Wilkins; why, I cannot tell, for ten pounds was not as much to her then as ten shillings had been in the old days; and, besides, it did not come out of her pocket.

Perhaps she wished he had spoken to her about it alone, and that she might have given it to me from herself, or, at any rate, as if it resulted from some asking of hers. Perhaps she felt the end was so near, there was no use in keeping up appearances any longer; perhaps she was not pleased because I told

her I meant soon to be married ; perhaps she felt tired out. Whatever might be the cause, she never seemed quite the same to me after, though she let me take my turn in the nursing as usual.

He would not have been best pleased if she had not, perhaps, for even to the last he tried to be master ; and besides it was not for long. Before the year was out he died ; and very shortly after the funeral my mistress and her mother started for the Continent. Martinly Hall, in Yorkshire, where Mr. Mason resided the last few months of his life, went to his cousin, that Hal about whom he raved in his illness. It could not have been left away from him, because of some entail that kept it, and a few farms adjacent, in the Mason family ; but I heard the old butler say it would have to be let or stay empty. "Mr. Henry," he said, "will never be able to keep the place up. All the land that goes with the Hall," he went on, "would not bring in two hundred a year. It is a pity, a great pity, Mr. Harlesdon was so foolish, but the mistake he made cannot be mended now."

CHAPTER III.

STILL MRS. CALCEY.

AS I meant to go out again as lady's-maid, it was necessary for me to ascertain where Mrs. Wilkins or Mrs. Mason was living. A character for honesty, industry, and minding my own business, I could have got easily enough from gentlefolk who had known me when I was a girl and after I was married. But other points would be inquired about; and, having decided to follow mother's advice, I wrote to the solicitor in Yorkshire who had attended to Mr. Mason's law business, and whom I had seen often while we were at Martinly Hall.

His name was Ramsden. A fine-looking old gentleman, with white hair and stately manners, but still kind and affable, who had constantly spoken some word to me when he came in and out of the sick-room.

By return of post his answer arrived. The letter was not in the least what anyone might expect a lawyer would have written. He said in it how sorry he was to hear of my trouble; that he remembered me very well indeed; that Mrs. Mason was not on the Continent now, but living at a village called Pur-

ling, a short distance from London; that he had often thought of all the care I took of poor Mr. Mason in his grievous illness, and he hoped I would excuse his sending me a couple of pounds to pay my fare to Purling and any other little expenses I might be put to. He also said, if he could at any time prove of assistance, he would be glad to help me. Poor mother cried when she saw the post-office order. She was astonished at his goodness, but the letter did not surprise me. It was just like him. He was always ready to do a kind action, and to put his hand in his pocket.

"Now, Nell," said my mother, when she had dried her eyes and taken up her knitting again, "what you had best do is to go up to Purling. It will be far better for you to see the ladies than to write; and you know the housekeeper at The Grange said there was no time to lose if you wanted the situation at Lady Poplett's. It need not cost you much; and if you don't chance to find the ladies at home one day, you can go on to London and sleep at your cousin John's, and come back to Purling next morning.

Purling was on our own railway, though a few miles off the main line; so there was no difficulty in doing what mother advised, par-

ticularly if I got up early and went off by the parliamentary.

But, O, with what a woful heart it was I stood on the platform of our little station, and thought of passing over the spot where my poor dear had met his death! He was a platelayer. That has not much to do with my story but still it is a link.

I had to wait a long time at Clapham Junction before the train for Purling came down from London, and my head felt dazed with the noise and the journey and the shouting of the newspaper-boys and the sight of the people bustling by.

It did not take an hour to get from there to Purling, which had changed from a village, as Mr. Ramsden remembered it, to a mere suburb of London. Houses, houses everywhere—close to the station, running up and down the green fields, bordering the once pleasant lanes, where great elms still here and there dotted the few fragments that remained of the ancient hedgerows. “Why, mother could never believe this was Purling,” if she came here, I thought; and then I asked a porter if he could tell me where I should find Alnwick House.

“I don’t know it,” he said. “Who lives there?”

"Mrs. Mason," I answered.

He shook his head.

"It is not hereabouts," he declared. "There may be such a place on the Common. Keep along the London road, and then turn a bit to your left, and that will bring you to the Green. Ask at the Black Lion, about a mile and half ahead of you."

I had not got down the steps, however, after thanking him for his civility, before he was after me.

"Hi! hold hard!" he shouted. "My mate says he knows the house you want. It belongs to a Mrs. Wilkins, though Mrs. Mason, her daughter, lives with her. It is on the furthest side of the Common, right across the Green."

What he said did not surprise me. Mrs. Wilkins had always been masterful, and, though her daughter owned the money, it was just like her to insist on doing the spending. At any rate, it seemed as though I should not have my journey for nothing. One or other of them would surely be at home.

The further I left the station behind me the pleasanter grew the way. Trees arched their branches over my head; in the wheat fields the reapers were busy. Now and again I caught glimpses of a river; here I passed

a great mansion; there I stopped to look at some wayside cottage, covered literally—walls, windows, roof, chimneys—with ivy and roses and clematis. I walked slowly, for I was still far from strong, and a sort of peace stole over me such as I had not felt before since that glorious morning when the sun of my life went down so suddenly in darkness.

Alnwick House did not seem to be very well known. Any person who is at all familiar with the suburbs of London must have often noticed how little people trouble themselves about their neighbours, even in places that at first sight seem to be very rural indeed. I must have walked about the Green, which was as quiet as any country meadow, for a long time, had I not at last happened to meet a nice pleasant-spoken elderly gentleman, who directed me straight to the place I wanted.

When I got there, after searching vainly for a servants' entrance, I rang the bell of the outer gate, from which up to the hall-door there was a covered walk that gave a great air of privacy to the house.

A very respectable servant-man came down to the gate, and, in answer to my question as to whether I could see Mrs. Mason, asked my name.

"Calcey," I said; and was going on to remark perhaps he had better say her old maid Briart would be glad to speak to his mistress, when he cut across my sentence with,

"Mrs. Mason has been expecting you this hour. Come in, if you please;" and he drew back the bolt and led the way up the walk into the hall.

It was a beautiful house, though not very large, and you could see right through glass doors at the end of the hall into a lovely garden all full of flowers. But I had not much time to notice these things, for the butler, saying, "You will find Mrs. Mason in the room at the end of the passage upstairs," left me to find my way there by myself.

For the minute I felt surprised; but then remembering Mr. Ramsden would be almost certain to mention that I had written to him, I could but think how kind he was and how considerate my former mistress.

"Making me as free of the house as if I had not been away from her a day," I said, almost aloud, as I ran up the flight, and walking straight to the door at the end of the passage, knocked softly upon the panel.

"Come in," a voice said; and, turning the handle, I found myself in a small but very

pretty dressing-room, darkened by outside blinds, and sweet with a hundred perfumes that came stealing through the open windows.

There were two in the apartment—and at the further one, with her back towards me, a lady sat in an easy-chair reading. As I entered she raised herself a little, and turned her head slightly towards the door.

“I thought you were never coming, Mrs. Darcy,” she said. “I hope you have been able to match that fringe?”

“There is some mistake, ma’am,” I began. “I am not Mrs. Darcy.”

“You have come from her, then, I suppose? Has she got that fringe?”

“No, ma’am—that is, I do not know whether she has or not. My name is Calcey. You remember Briart, that used to live with you and your mamma?”

I was so confused I scarcely recollect whether those were the very words I spoke, but they were like them. As I finished she rose, and with her hair all loose and streaming over her shoulders, stood up, one hand resting on the back of the chair, the other, which held her book, hanging down by her side. I could but notice how thick her hair had grown, and how much comelier and better she herself looked. A ray of sunlight, which crept through

a chink in one of the blinds, fell on her head as she turned and faced me; and I remember that it passed through my mind she must have been using some of the washes that were then in vogue to make dull locks look golden. Her hair when I had to dress it was a nasty drab, and now it glittered and glinted as the wandering beam played over it.

"I do not recollect you," she said. "What name did you say?"

"Briart. I lived with you as maid after you married Mr. Mason. I was with you at Martinly Hall."

"O, I remember now," she said; but she did not. I saw I had passed as completely out of her memory as if she had never seen me.

That was Miss Emily all over, however: the moment people had served her turn she could throw them off like an old glove, and forget they had ever existed. Besides, seven years had passed, and in that time a mistress often manages to blot other things besides the face of a former servant out of her mind.

"It is long since we heard anything of you," she went on, and she spoke hurriedly and sharper than usual.

I said it was; that I did not know till the other day that she was living in Surrey.

"How did you know then?" she asked.

Though she had grown so much stouter, I thought she must still be nervous; for even through the closed blinds I was able to see that her colour went and came, and that the hand she had laid upon the back of the chair shook as she seemed to lean upon it.

I began at the beginning, and told her as shortly as I could about the suddenness of my husband's death and my own long illness. I said I thought it best for me to take a situation; but that I could not of course get one unless I had a character.

"I don't mean for honesty or steadiness, ma'am," I added; "because the housekeeper at the great house in our village has answered for all that to Lady Poplett; but her ladyship wants a really useful maid—one who is able, as she says, to discharge her duties thoroughly and satisfactorily."

"I see," observed my former mistress thoughtfully. "I need not tell you, Bryant, I will do everything I can for you."

It certainly struck me as strange she should call me Bryant instead of Briart; but it did not seem any stranger to me than her whole manner. Indeed I was so astonished by her ways altogether, that I forgot to say how much obliged I felt to her.

"What is it you want me to do?" she went

on, crossing the room and seating herself at a small writing-table. "Shall I give you a note now to Lady Poplett, or do you think she would wish to see me?"

I answered that I thought a note would be quite sufficient; her ladyship, I added, desired me, if possible, to enter upon her service at once.

"Where does she live?" asked Mrs. Mason.

"Sometimes in London, ma'am; but for the most part in Lincolnshire."

"O!" said my former mistress; and she drew a blotting-book towards her, took out some paper, and began to write.

"Let me see," she remarked, pausing, "if I recollect rightly you dress hair very well."

"I always gave you satisfaction with yours, ma'am," I replied, "though it was not so long or so thick or so beautiful a colour when I had the handling of it."

I could not have helped saying that if my life had depended upon my silence. Something quite separate from my will seemed to compel me to speak the words, though I could have bitten my tongue next minute for its freedom.

She did not appear to mind my bluntness, however; she laughed and looked pleased, and, turning her head round a little, glanced over her shoulder at the golden veil which reached far below her waist.

"I have had an easy mind of late years," she remarked, "and that is good for the hair; and I do believe caps make it grow. Look what heaps of hair our grandmothers all had; and their heads were always covered from marriage to the grave, to say nothing of in their cradles. Nowadays, of course, one can have one's hair any colour one pleases. I wanted to dye mine black but mamma objected. You could soon change yours to a beautiful red."

I shook my head. If she was able to joke about widows' caps, I could not forget who it was once loved to liken my locks to the raven's wing.

"Well," she proceeded presently, "I have said you can dress hair to perfection—you must learn how to treat it if her ladyship is getting gray; then you get up laces beautifully. And what about needlework, and so forth?"

I felt I was going crazy. I had never got up a scrap of lace for her in my life, while a needle was rarely out of my hand for months before her marriage.

"I am a very good dressmaker, ma'am," was all I could say, however; and she wrote on rapidly for a minute or two.

"There, that's done!" she exclaimed, blotting off the note, putting it in an envelope

she had already addressed to Lady Poplett, and finally handing it to me.

Then she leant her head back against the rail of the chair, and said—

“If I could afford to keep a maid now, I would take you myself, and not allow you to go to Lady Poplett. Indeed, I feel half tempted to tear up my note and say she shall not have you, only mamma would be angry. By-the-bye, you have not asked after mamma.”

No chance had been given me; but I apologised all the same, and hoped she was quite well, and that I might be able to see her.

“I am sorry to say she is not at home,” answered her daughter. “You must call the next time you are in the neighbourhood. I know she would like to see you. She has often wondered what you were doing. O, I have made such a stupid mistake in that note! Written out your character in your maiden name. I suppose I must write it over again.”

“It does not signify, ma’am,” I said. “The housekeeper at The Grange knows me as well by one name as another.”

After that I stood for a moment uncertain as to what I ought to do. Clearly as I remembered Mrs. Wilkins’ ways of old, it certainly never occurred to me that I should, after suc-

a journey, be allowed to leave her house without being asked to break my fast ; and I waited, not indeed because I wanted food, but rather because it seemed a necessity that it should be offered to me.

Evidently no thought was, however, further from Miss Emily's mind.

"If there is anything else I can do for you, Bryant, be sure and write to me," she said, taking up her book as a sign that the interview was ended. "I feel so sorry about your trouble. I hope you will get on nicely at Lady Poplett's. Good-morning."

And before I had well recovered my senses I found myself in the lobby, and walking down the stairs and crossing the hall, and answering some remark made by the butler concerning the weather ; and then I was outside the gate and on the Green, walking slowly, slowly, and thinking that Miss Emily, altered as she was in person, had not changed much in point of selfishness since I first knew her.

When I reached the other side of the Common, and was going along the foot-path leading to Purling, I passed close beside a lady and gentleman standing at the gate of one of the red-brick houses of which there were several near the church.

The gentleman was a clergyman, and the

lady, though her back was towards me, I should have known for Mrs. Wilkins among a thousand.

For an instant I hesitated as to whether I should hang about a little, and speak to her when she was at leisure; but next minute I went on, feeling sure she would not thank me for waylaying her.

As I passed quite close to where they were standing, I heard her say to the gentleman—

“No, we do not intend to go abroad at all this year. Dear Emily is now so strong, it is quite safe for her to winter in England.”

“Strong!” I repeated to myself. “I should think she is strong;” and then it came into my head that perhaps she was staying in England in order to catch the clergyman.

I do not exactly know why I should have thought anything of the sort; only I knew every tone in Mrs. Wilkins’ voice, and could have told blindfold if she was bent on any mischief.

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW SERVICE.

BENJAMIN CALCEY had been dead for more than a year, and his widow was still at service, “earning her living,” and so

ing home the best part of her wages, which remittances Mrs. Briart carried at once to the Post-Office Savings Bank.

In the little garden down at Dapplemead the cresses had grown and the roses bloomed and the honeysuckles scented the air—"just as though poor Ben were here to see them," said his mother-in-law, sighing at the exceeding fairness and heartlessness of Nature, while in a large house in a by no means fashionable quarter of London Mrs. Calcey was spending a hot, dusty summer.

She had left Lady Poplett's service, not for any fault of her own, or for any fault she had to find with her mistress. If fussy, Lady Poplett was kind; if parsimonious, just; if exacting, regular. It was not the work but the place which tried Ellen. She missed the life and freedom that had of late years fallen so largely to her lot—the sound of many voices, the prattle of children, the laughter of young people—and she gladly availed herself of the opportunity offered by a whim of her ladyship to give notice.

In the very dead of the winter-time Lady Poplett elected to go abroad; and, though her maid accompanied her as far as Paris, and remained there till she found a Frenchwoman to her mind, Mrs. Calcey soon returned to

England, having said plainly that for no wages which could be offered would she stay where the sea and a long journey and an expensive system of telegrams separated her from the dear ones at Dapplemead.

"Well, well," commented her ladyship, who, though she had no dear ones anywhere, was not hard-hearted or unsympathetic, "it is natural enough, I daresay; when you are forty years older, however, you will perhaps think less of others and more of your own interests."

And having so spoken, Lady Poplett set herself to work to get her maid a very good place indeed; not in a great family, but with gentlefolks, who, though somewhat unburdened with this world's goods, were a very joyous and united and pleasant household.

No time or opportunity to be dull or feel lonely inside those doors, I warrant, what with Miss Molly's piano and Master Jack's friends, and those growing-up girls, Sara and Annie, and the young Turk George, and studious little Arthur, and Miriam, the youngest of all, and the pet of brothers, sisters, father, and mother.

Before Mrs. Calcey, or Ellen as she was called then, had been with them a week she loved every member of the family.

She could babble to the little ones about her own children toddling along the banks of

the canal; and Miss Molly had put aside some old dresses for the girls, and her mamma looked over the wardrobes of her own boys to find some garments that might clothe the fast-growing country-urchins' limbs.

Ah, me! that was a kindly and a generous family. No servant left them with dry eyes, no friend parted from them unmoved. Lazarus at their gates had far more than crumbs from their table; and it was amongst the legends of the family that once their father had, during the course of foreign travel, lighted upon a certain man who happened to be in grievous trouble, and tended and succoured him till he was well.

This story Miss Molly told the new maid, with many pretty hesitations and mantling blushes; but she did not explain that when the stranger recovered he vowed, if both in the future were agreeable, his boy should marry Mr. Montrellé's girl. He had long been dead, but his project survived him. Some day Miss Molly hoped to become the wife of that son, long since grown to manhood.

What a delightful fuss there always was when the young ladies were bidden to a party! They did not go out to any grand balls, for they were not rich, and they did not visit except amongst their relations and intimate friends.

If dresses could have been ordered from some fashionable milliner, and gloves and shoes and ribbons and flowers had, merely by writing a note desiring them to be sent in, the pleasure never could have seemed so great as when every detail was planned and thought over and talked about.

Why, by that means the party lasted for days instead of one evening; and then it was delightful to hear the little disputes amongst the girls—not as to which of them should have the best, but as to which should take the worst.

“I consider myself almost a married woman,” Molly would say; “and you know married people should always dress more quietly than girls.”

“The very idea!” Sara exclaimed. “I wonder what somebody would say, if he walked in and saw you looking such a dowdy. It does not matter in the least what we wear, as we are not considered to be ‘out,’ but we must put our best foot foremost for you.”

“I have got a whole sovereign godmamma gave me, remember,” cried Annie; “that is I have lent five shillings out of it to Jack, but with the rest you must buy fresh trimmings for your dress, Molly. Wait till I am engaged! I shall then insist upon having the finest and newest of everything.”

They were all alike. There was no need for the father to dread bills being presented to him unawares. When the girls kissed him in the mornings, he knew their loving greetings were never intended as prefaces to a demand for money. Sometimes when he tried to press a gift upon them, Molly, as spokeswoman, would refuse it with a loving hug and tearful eyes.

"We shall manage beautifully, papa," she was wont to say; "and you have quite enough to do without our troubling you more than we can help."

Which, indeed, was only too true. What with rent and taxes, and butcher and grocer and baker, and life insurance, and Heaven only knows what beside, the kindly gentleman had enough to do to make both ends meet. He never could have succeeded had wife and children and servants failed to second his endeavours.

As for Ellen, she would have done anything which lay in her power for any one of them. In her own cottage she had never felt more at home than she did in that roomy London house. The cook and housemaid had been with the Montrelles for years—indeed, the housemaid had formerly been nurse—and, seeing that the new-comer was faithful and

willing like themselves, they tried to make the place as pleasant to her as possible.

There was one thing, however, they tried to laugh her out of, but tried without success.

At times she would sit either with empty hands or needle suspended in air, looking intently at some object which certainly was not present to her bodily eye.

"If it is your poor dear husband, or your children, or your mother you are thinking about, for mercy's sake say so," urged the cook; "only don't stare straight before you at nothing."

"I am sure you are enough to turn a person's blood cold," supplemented nurse. "It would be better for you to talk out than keep your trouble to yourself. I have known sorrow too, and I am sure I feel for you."

Then Ellen would take up her stitching again, and say, "I was not thinking about anybody belonging to me, but I am sorely puzzled."

"What about?"

"That I cannot tell you; indeed, I don't know myself."

"Nonsense; if you are in any perplexity, why don't you speak to master or missis?"

"They couldn't help me."

"Then you must be a walking mystery!"

Ellen had been in the service of the Montrelle

family about six months, when little Arthur was taken very ill indeed. The doctors saved his life with some difficulty, and then said he must be sent out of town immediately.

Now there was no one except Ellen who could conveniently go with him, and accordingly she went with the child to Hastings.

After her return in the later part of the autumn, both cook and housemaid noticed Mrs. Calcey seemed stranger than ever.

"She must have murdered somebody," said the cook.

"Or been crossed in love," remarked the housemaid. "Considering she is getting on for thirty, she is still very pretty."

Yes, Ellen was a very pretty woman, and her modest ways and soft voice proved wonderfully attractive to the other sex; but she had loved the love of her life, and had no thought to spare for marrying or giving in marriage.

"Ben would rise from his grave if I ever imagined such a thing, miss," she said one day to Molly Montrelle; and her young lady answered,

"If you loved him as well as I do somebody, you could not imagine it, Ellen."

The year was drawing to a close, and the Montrelles' mincemeat was made, the Christmas pudding talked of, the regulation turkey pro-

mised, when one morning Mrs. Calcey received a letter saying her youngest child was very ill indeed, and begging her to come to Dapplemead at once if she wished to see him alive.

In a minute after hearing the news the Montrelles were assisting her departure.

Mrs. Montrelle produced a five-pound note—and five-pound notes were not easily got or kept in the household; Molly asked,

“You poor soul, could I be of any use if I went down with you, or should I be only in the way?”

Jack ran out for a cab; and while Sara put on their maid’s bonnet, Annie stood with a warm shawl hung over her arm.

“He will get well when he sees you,” said Arthur, sobbing; and cook and housemaid both agreed “It is no wonder she is not like other people; look what a handful of trouble she has to take hold of.”

When she reached Waterloo another surprise awaited her. The first person she beheld on the platform was Miss Molly’s “young man.”

“Why, Ellen,” he said, recognising her, “where in the world are you off to?” and then, seeing her eyes were red and swelled with weeping, he went on, “I hope nothing has happened to any of your children.” Showing, as Mrs. Calcey remarked afterwards, that

Miss Molly had talked about her and the children to him.

While she told him of her fresh anxiety he stood listening attentively, and, when she had quite finished, said,

"Now let me put you into a compartment, and I will get your ticket, and you must try to think you will find your little boy better when you reach Dapplemead."

She did not notice till he came back with the ticket that he had intended she should travel second class.

When she tried to remonstrate, he only said, "You will be quieter here;" and disappeared.

But when the train reached the junction, before she could turn the handle of the door he had opened it for her.

"I do hope to hear good news of your boy, Ellen," he said; and then had to hurry away and take his seat in the main-line train.

CHAPTER V.

ELLEN'S PERPLEXITY.

BEFORE Mrs. Calcey arrived at Dapplemead, a change for the better had taken place in her child's condition, and although the doctor

could not pronounce him out of danger, yet he spoke more hopefully about the boy, and said that possibly he might be able to save him.

For days and nights the mother sat beside the bed, feeling with Jacob, "If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." But at the end of a week all cause for anxiety was over; and the little fellow, weak but convalescent, was smiling in his mother's face, and playing with her dress.

At Dapplemead, however, as in London, Mrs. Calcey was subject to those fits of abstraction which so puzzled her fellow-servants.

When her child lay asleep she would sit for an hour at a stretch doing nothing, looking at nothing, but seemingly lost in a reverie. If at such times any one addressed her she would start and look confused as though suddenly aroused from a dream. She said she was happy in her situation, and could find no words sufficient to express her affection for Mrs. Montrelle and all the family; and yet she seemed unsettled and unhappy, alternating between feverish activity and idle depression.

Mrs. Briart had not been slow to notice this change, which she at first attributed to anxiety concerning the child; but after a time she could not avoid seeing that, so far from growing more cheerful when the pressing dread was over,

her daughter seemed to sink into a state of greater despondency. She waited for a short while, thinking that perhaps confidence might be given unasked, for never before had she known Ellen keep a secret from her; but, observing no symptom of frankness, she determined to broach the subject.

It was Sunday evening; the children were in bed; the fire had burnt low and bright; the kitchen where they sat was snug and warm; there was soup in a little saucepan on the trivet, getting hot for their suppers by and by; the *Pilgrim's Progress* lay open on the round table, and the place where she had been reading was marked by Mrs. Briart's spectacles. The light given by one candle seemed rather to increase the gloom than to dispel it. Leaning back in an old armchair, Mrs. Calcey watched the glowing embers, but spoke never a word.

"You have got something on your mind, girl," said Mrs. Briart, breaking the silence with an abruptness which made her daughter start.

"And if I have, mother?" asked the younger woman.

"Why, you had better tell me what it is," was the answer.

"Perhaps if I did you would say you would rather I had held my tongue."

"Try me," advised Mrs. Briart. Then, as

the other relapsed into her accustomed silence, she repeated the words once again.

"Try me," she said; and she stretched out her hand, and stroked her daughter's hair with a touch that seemed to carry comfort in its quiet tenderness.

"Mother, I am very unhappy," began Mrs. Calcey.

"I see you are, Nell."

"I do not know what to think or to do."

"Suppose we take counsel together, then, dear. People say, 'two heads are better than one.'"

"But I do not want to make you uncomfortable."

"I cannot be comfortable seeing you troubled as you are."

"I think, mother, you will never believe what I am going to tell you."

"I will believe anything, Nell, unless you tell me you are going to marry again; and I should be very sorry to have to credit that."

The younger widow shook her head.

"I do not think I shall ever come to you with that story, mother."

"Well, then, what is the story?" asked the elder woman impatiently. "You have not robbed or murdered anybody, I suppose?"

"No; *I* have not robbed any one."

"Who has, then, in the name of patience?" cried Mrs. Briart. "For gracious' sake, Nell, speak out, and let us have done with it. All my life long I could never a-bear secrets and mysteries."

"I am sure I do not like them either; and if I could only make up my mind what was right——"

"I should think no one need ever think twice about what is right; that must be always clear enough," interrupted her mother. "Come, child, let us hear all about it."

"You know I have told you what a nice young lady Miss Molly is?" began Mrs. Calcey.

"Yes, to be sure, but it is nothing about her, I hope."

"And what a pleasant, affable, generous gentleman she has got for a lover?"

Mrs. Briart nodded.

"But I have not told you his name."

Her mother looked up interested, but spoke no word.

"It is Mason; he is that 'Hal' Mr. Harlesdon Mason talked about on his deathbed, and he is the owner now of Martinly Hall."

"Then he will be a good match for your Miss Molly."

"No; they are so poor they can't marry at present. It seems that Mr. Harlesdon made

some settlement on Miss Emily, which gives her three thousand a year for life; and as long as she lives this gentleman has nothing but the old Hall and a small quantity of land. These could not be willed away or settled; but master might have left the three thousand a year to his wife if he had liked, and then she could have given it to any one she chose. That was what Mrs. Wilkins wanted him to do, I believe, on his deathbed; but he would not. The way things are now is, that while Mrs. Mason lives he is, in a manner of speaking, a beggar. There is some mortgage on the Hall; and there are expenses connected with keeping up the place. It has been let till lately; but the gentleman who rented it has lost all his money and been obliged to go abroad; so that really, as far as I can understand, the present Mr. Mason is worse off than if he had no property at all."

"Still property is property," remarked Mrs. Briart, sapiently; "and when Mrs. Mason dies he will have a deal of money; though to be sure she is as likely to outlive him as he is to outlast her."

Her daughter did not answer. She only leant her head on her hand and looked into the fire.

"Why need you trouble yourself about it, Nell?" asked her mother, after a pause. "After all a wife is a wife, and Mr. Mason

had a right to do what he liked with his own."

"I never heard anybody say he had not," replied Mrs. Calcey; "but it is not that which worries me."

"Well, what is it, then?"

"You see, if Mrs. Mason were dead this young gentleman would be rich enough."

"Of course he would; but he does not want to kill her, does he?"

"No; but I believe she *is* dead."

The elder woman drew back a little, and asked, in evident surprise,

"When did she die?"

"That I do not know."

"What do you mean, girl? Do you think there has been any foul play?"

"I am afraid so, and I am afraid it is still going on. I feel as sure as I am sitting here that Mr. Harlesdon Mason's widow is dead, and that the lady I saw at Purling is no more Mrs. Wilkins' daughter than I am."

"I do not understand you."

"Why, mother, surely I have spoken plain enough. If Miss Emily is dead, that three thousand a year ought to go to this present gentleman."

Mrs. Briart sat silent for a moment; then she asked,

"Who knows of this besides yourself?"

"I do not think anybody ~~has~~ pieced it all together but me."

"Then the best thing you can do is to unpiece it—a pack of nonsense, child!"

"It is not nonsense, mother; I only wish it was."

"Well, whatever it may be, it is no business of yours: it is not a matter for you to make or to mull in. Let the gentlefolks look after their own affairs for themselves. If they are being cheated they will find that out fast enough, I warrant."

"But you said, mother, one need never think twice about what is right."

"And I say so again. If you keep straight yourself you'll have quite enough to do, without putting your fingers into other folks' pies."

"But, mother, just listen to me."

"I don't want to hear nothing more about it," said Mrs. Briart, tersely, if ungrammatically.

"Lot of rubbish, Nell. You have been reading some of those silly novels that are enough to turn a stronger head than yours."

Ellen Calcey sighed. The experiment of taking another person into her confidence had not, she felt, thus far, proved signally successful.

CHAPTER VI.

RIGHT IS RIGHT.

MR. HENRY MASON sat alone in his chambers, situated on the second-floor of a house in Clement's Inn. He felt singularly depressed and disheartened. The dull days before Christmas had come with a leaden sky and a drizzling rain; and dull times had fallen upon his fortunes, and one disaster after another seemed darkening his present and obscuring his future.

Not a post arrived but brought with it some contribution of unpleasantness big or little. There was nothing he desired he appeared able to obtain; he had but to stretch his hand out to seize any object, and, lo, it eluded his grasp. One appointment after another he tried to secure, but his endeavours proved useless.

He thought over every possible way of repairing his fortunes, but without success. He had lit upon a vein of ill-luck, and seemed destined to work it out exhaustively.

There was Martinly Hall on his hands now. He did not know what to do with that.

"I almost think I will go to live down there myself and turn farmer," he said, half aloud; "but if I did, I suppose the hay would heat

and the weevil get amongst the wheat. I should have my sheep dying with rot, and the stall-cattle would develop some fresh form of plague. Were it not for Molly I should sail for the Colonies; but I cannot go away and leave her—I cannot.”

And then tenderly, as if already it were part and parcel of himself, he took out a little case, and looked at the bright bauble it contained, lying so softly on the rich blue-velvet lining.

“What a poor little gift it is!” he thought; “and yet how pleased my darling will be to have it! I can in anticipation hear her scolding me for my extravagance. O, Molly, I only wish for your sake I could afford to be extravagant!”

And he fell to musing, thinking how delightful it would be if he were rich enough to buy all sorts of rare and lovely things for his pretty one, his good, true, brave, sweet little girl.

From this reverie he was roused by a knock at the door of his room.

“Come in!” he cried, and then stood up, amazed to see a woman cross the threshold.

It was in the half light, which is so dim and indistinct during the winter-time of year, and till she came nearer to the hearth he could not distinguish her face; but the moment he did so he cried,

"What is the matter, Ellen? Anything wrong with—with——"

"No, sir; Miss Molly is quite well, and they are all quite well at the Square. I have come, sir, to speak to you, if I may, about a matter that has long been troubling me."

"To be sure you may," he answered, "I only hope I shall be able to help you. Sit down. And now what is it?"

"Sir," she began, "I think you are being kept out of your rights, and that I ought to have spoken sooner; but, you see, I could not tell for certain——"

"What could you not tell for certain?" he asked, as she paused and hesitated.

"Whether my old mistress, Miss Emily, was really dead and buried, and some one else getting her money in her stead."

Mrs. Calcey stopped suddenly. The young man was holding her tightly by the wrist.

"Take care what you are saying," he exclaimed.

"I am speaking the truth, sir, as far as I know it," she answered. "My mother advised me not to make or mull in the affair, for it was no business of mine: but when I came back and saw Miss Molly's sweet face, and the children gathered about me with their pleasant ways, I felt I could keep silence no longer: so

now, sir, you know just what I believe, and can act as you like."

"I beg your pardon," he said, releasing her wrist, and seating himself in his accustomed chair. "Now tell me exactly what you think, and why you think it."

She began at the beginning, and told him everything through to the end. When she had finished he made no comment on her story, but, rising and taking his hat, said, "Wait here, please, till I come back," and then left her without another word.

She did not trouble or perplex herself about what he was going to do; the matter was now out of her hands; the secret, whether for good or for evil, had passed away from her keeping. She had done right, if tardily; and if no one else had done wrong, why harm could not come of it to any person.

And yet never in her life, perhaps, had she felt so kindly towards Mrs. Wilkins. Never was the knowledge more bitter that through her this blow must be dealt, if a blow were dealt at all.

She looked back over her life; she thought of her own small temptations, of how securely she had been kept all her days from the desire to commit any heinous sin; and yet how often she must have gone wrong but for the lessons

learned at her grandfather's knee, the patient endurance and unremitting toil of her mother, and the sight and knowledge of the stanch faithfulness and rugged honesty of the poor people amongst whom her childish days had been passed.

Since she had been out to service she had known little misses and little masters, whose hands were far more given to picking and stealing than the boys and girls with whom she went to school; and, in a dumb, inconsequent sort of way, the idea assumed some sort of shape in her mind that to the peer as to the peasant it might be of the most enormous importance whether or not he came of an honest stock.

As, for instance, her mind ran idly over the scenes she had witnessed at Mrs. Wilkins'; the mean shifts, the false actions and falser statements, the utter selfishness, the lack of all idea of responsibility here or accountability hereafter; the scheming, the absence of all worthy motives, the utter disregard of everything which could not advance worldly interests or further some ignoble end.

What had Miss Emily ever seen or heard to render her a good wife or a noble woman? what, perhaps, had Mrs. Wilkins herself ever seen? How could one reared in such an at-

mosphere escape mental infection, any more than a person dwelling with foul surroundings could escape disease?

And there could be little doubt that the woman who was now passing as Mrs. Mason had also been educated to regard success as the only one thing needful.

Of herself she might not have been able to plan and carry out such a deception; but she must, Mrs. Calcey felt, have taken to it kindly. Hers was the smooth skin, the calm brow, the quiet eye, the plump figure of one who was troubled by no qualms of conscience, by no remorse, by very little dread of detection. She looked prosperous and well-to-do, easy in her mind, with no fox gnawing at her breast.

All these thoughts, and many more of the same kind, passed through Ellen's mind as she sat near the window, looking out into the deepening darkness of the coming night. She could not have given expression to them, she could not have put them into shape or form, because the moulding and clothing of ideas are matters which do not come quite naturally to people in any rank in life, but least of all to one born in the class Mrs. Calcey had sprung from, and educated as she had been; but they stirred her very heart for all that, and filled it with a great pity and a yearning sorrow. She

would have liked to save her old mistress from the consequences of her own act. She wanted to see Miss Molly's future husband righted and in possession of his own, but she shrank from the idea that Mrs. Wilkins would be punished and perhaps beggared. She had never honoured that lady's grey hairs, but still she could not endure the idea of their being covered with shame.

It was hard that it should have been all her doing, but she could not hesitate or draw back now. She had spoken, and could not recall her words. If she could, she would not. All she felt most grieved for was that she had kept silence so long.

Mr. Mason was but a short time absent.

He came back accompanied by another gentleman, whose voice she recognised in a moment as it rang clear and hearty through the room.

"This is a strange way for us to meet, Mrs. Calcey," said Mr. Ramsden, walking up to her and stretching out his hand as pleasantly as if she had been some lady of high degree. "The story you have been telling Mr. Mason sounds so odd, that, as he seems rather confused, I think I should like to hear it for myself."

And then he busied himself drawing down the blinds, while Mr. Mason lit the lamp, and

pulled forward an easy-chair for his friend's accommodation.

"Now, Briart (the old name comes most naturally from my lips you hear), to begin at the beginning of this strange tale: you got my letter, and then, as I understand, went to Purling and saw Mrs. Mason."

"Yes, sir."

"And it did not occur to you then there was anything wrong?"

"No, sir. I was puzzled a bit, but I did not imagine there was anything wrong. You see, many years had passed since I left Martinly, and Miss Emily was ill and weak in those days, and poor master harassed and tried too; and they did not agree, as you know, and she was always fretting."

"Exactly; and so—"

"When I saw her fat and well it did not seem to me so very strange that she should look different in some ways. As to her hair, the gold in it did not surprise me, because, as you have perhaps heard, ladies can make their hair any colour nowadays; and though the length and thickness astonished me, still I thought she might have got something to make it grow."

"Quite true. Then when you left you had no suspicion that you had not seen Mrs. Mason?"

"No, sir. I was not quite easy in my mind, and yet I could not have said why I was uneasy. The thing that I have thought of most since that day was that she did not know me. No, sir, she did not; and she did not to the last remember my name. When I told it to her, she took it up wrong, and called me Bryant and wrote Bryant; still I knew poor Miss Emily never troubled much to remember anything that did not concern herself, and many people forget names."

"Of course they do. And so you got the character you went after, and engaged yourself as maid to Lady Poplett; and in the course of a few months you travelled to Paris with your new mistress. Tell us just what occurred there."

"I was sitting one day in her ladyship's bedroom mending some lace, when I heard voices of people talking on the other side of the partition. The rooms were divided with wood panelling, and every word came quite as distinct to me as if spoken in my very ear. I might not have taken so much notice, only it seemed strange to hear English spoken in France; and besides, I felt as if I knew the voice."

"It seems you did too."

"Yes, it was my old mistress, Mrs. Wilkins' voice. She said,

“We ought to leave here at once. It will never do to run the risk of meeting her at such close quarters.’

“Then the other lady answered, in the slow sort of drawling way Miss Emily had of talking and with her little lisp,

“‘You are sure you made no mistake?’

“‘Do you think I am purblind or doting?’ asked Mrs. Wilkins. ‘I saw her going out with her mistress this morning. Mistake! One can’t mistake a face one has lived in the house with for years. She must not meet you again. I would rather run the gauntlet of a dozen detectives than of one lady’s-maid. There are a hundred little things they notice about one of their own sex a man would never see.’”

“It was a true observation,” remarked Mr. Ramsden, “and one which did credit to the old lady’s astuteness. Well, what did the other answer?”

“They were interrupted, I think,—at any rate, I heard no more; but what I had heard excited my curiosity so much, I asked Lady Poplett if she would kindly ask whether a Mrs. Wilkins was in the hotel, and the number of the room. I can’t think what possessed me, for I am sure I did not want to be mixed up with them; but I sent a message to say I should like to pay my duty to Mrs. Mason.”

"Yes ; and the answer ?"

"I had leave to do so ; but I did not see Mrs. Mason then, only Mrs. Wilkins, and she was chatty and pleasant, to be sure. She was so sorry her daughter was out (but I knew she was not out), and didn't I think her altered ? She said poor dear Mr. Mason had been a great trial, and there was no disguising the fact his death had proved a great relief, Emily had been very ill for a long time after she was left a widow, and all that sort of thing ; and then she asked lots of questions about what I was doing and how I happened to be in Paris.

"I told her I was leaving almost immediately, and asked if I could take anything back for her to England ; and then she was even more civil. She thought she would trouble me with a small parcel, and she only wished Mrs. Mason was in ; but she had gone to see some friends at Versailles, and would be away for a few days. Before I started, however, I managed to make sure Mrs. Mason was in the hotel all the time, and, myself unseen, to get a good look at her.

"She is very like Miss Emily. I declare, even after what I had heard, I could not have said for certain it was not my young mistress grown older, stouter, and better looking."

There was a moment's pause. Mr. Ramsden

turned his eyes upon Mr. Mason's anxious face ; then he looked at Mrs. Calcey, and said briskly,

"We come, now, to the time when you went out of town with Master Arthur Montrelle. Tell me about what happened at the lodgings in Hastings, please."

"I had not a thought in my mind then about Mrs. Wilkins or her daughter," answered Mrs. Calcey. "I was troubled at having the whole care of Master Arthur, and yet I felt glad too. When he began to get stronger I did not stay in his room at night ; and often after he was in bed I went down into the landlady's parlour and had a chat with her, or else into the kitchen ; for the servant was a nice respectable young woman, well spoken and good principled.

"One night it so happened she had brought a fancy sort of trunk—a kind of miniature trunk, small enough to carry about easily and set on a table—into the kitchen to look out some buttons she wanted to trim a dress.

"They had got scattered among the other things, and she turned out several articles in order to find them more easily.

"At last she put a funny little box before my eyes, and said,

"'Did you ever see anything like that before?' evidently meaning that I never had.

"I looked at it, and I looked again.

“ ‘May I take off the lid?’ I asked.

“ ‘And turn over everything there is inside if you like,’ she answered.

“ ‘Where on earth did you get it?’ I said.

“ ‘A lady that is dead gave it to me,’ she explained, going on looking for her buttons. ‘It is more curious than pretty, I think; but I have kept it for her sake. Poor Mrs. Mason, she did suffer!’

“ Her words gave me such a turn, I could not see for a minute. Lamp, table, box, everything seemed to go round and round; but at last my head steadied, and there was Alice still hunting for the buttons.

“ I asked her to tell me all about Mrs. Mason. I said I once lived with a lady of that name; and she told me all quite straight. How she was living in London at the time with a Miss Gresham, who let out apartments, and Mrs. Mason and her mother came up from somewhere in the country, so as to be near medical advice.

“ They were going abroad as soon as the younger lady got well enough to travel; ‘But Lor,’ said Alice, ‘she soon went a far longer journey. When the doctor came he said she was in a galloping consumption, and sure enough it was all over within a couple of months. The poor mother did take on dread-

ful; it might have touched a heart of stone to see her. I heard her say one day to her daughter, "I don't know, Emily, what will become of me when you are gone." And Mrs. Mason answered quite indifferent like; but then she was so bad and ill that no doubt she did not care much about anything. "It is unfortunate certainly, mamma, but it is not my fault." There was no shortness of money, but they seemed friendless and all alone in the world. Not a soul came to see them, and when Mrs. Mason was buried not a creature "followed" but the mother."

"Humph!" said Mr. Ramsden dryly. "Do you happen to remember, Briart, where this Miss Gresham lived?"

"I took it all down, sir, as I got it from Alice—leastways I wrote it in a book when I got to my own room; the name of the street and the number, the address of the doctor—everything you will find set down here, sir;" and Mrs. Calcey handed him an old diary bound in red morocco, which had been given to her years and years previously.

"You have no idea, I suppose," asked Mr. Ramsden, as he took the book from her, "who this lady is that you suppose cannot be Miss Emily, otherwise Mrs. Mason?"

"Yes, sir, I have," was the unexpected

reply; "and that came about in a most curious way too. A mate of my poor dear husband's was born and reared in that part of the country where all the Wilkinsons belonged. He used to lodge with us, and many a time has talked about Mrs. Wilkins and her mean ways, and Miss Emily, afterwards Mrs. Mason. He remembered her from a child.

"Well, after I came to London to Mr. Montrelle's, I saw him two or three times at my cousin's, and once he chanced to mention he had been working on the line near Purling; and at church there he had seen my former mistress, Mrs. Wilkins.

"And Mrs. Mason too, I suppose?" I said.

"No," he answered; "she was not there, but her cousin was—old Mat Wilkins' daughter: she would make two of Miss Emily, and has the loveliest head of hair you ever looked at."

"I asked a few questions, and found out what he could tell me; and that is all, sir, I think."

"Very good," commented Mr. Ramsden; and now turning to Mr. Mason, he added, "I suppose you will leave the matter with me."

"Heaven knows I do not desire to have any say in it," answered the young man; then, turning to Mrs. Calcey, he added, "*You* will not mention the affair to any one without my permission, Ellen."

"No sir. I never have said a word about it except to my mother; and I should not have spoken now, only that I could not rest longer with the weight of it on my mind."

CHAPTER VII.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

CHRISTMAS-EVE came to the great world of London, and especially to the large house in the unfashionable square.

Such a season for gifts was never beheld. Such people for giving as the Montrelles it would have been difficult to find.

Out of their small income they contrived to make more homes happy than many with ten times their wealth.

As for Miss Molly, a sum of money had been sent to her on the morning of the 24th, anonymously, which quite turned her head.

On the inside was written in an unknown hand:

"A trifle to aid in helping your humble friends to spend a merry Christmas."

And be sure that money did not long burn her pocket.

To one she sent coals; to another a joint; to a third some warm apparel; where there were

children, toys; where there was illness, the nourishment or the attendance which seemed most needed. Ellen was about with her all that day; and Ellen watched her in the evening, when Mr. Mason came and kissed her, not under the mistletoe, but away from all the others.

"My darling," he said, "I wonder if before this time next year you will agree to make me as happy as you have those poor people to-day."

And there was a hopeful tone in his voice, and a glad light in his eye, that Ellen had never before heard in the one, or seen in the other.

That night, as they gathered round the hearth, after all the guests had departed, his talk ran on Martinly Hall.

"Now would be the time for you to see the place, Mrs. Montrelle," he said, "while it is tenantless;" and then they all laughed at the idea, as though it were a capital joke; and one of the boys insisted upon the ghost story associated with the Hall being repeated at length, and the younger girls said they should be afraid to go to bed after hearing it, and Molly smiled softly with a tender love-light shining in her sweet eyes.

The next morning what kissing and making of presents there was before breakfast! It was a

pretty sight to see the family gathered about their mother, wishing her a merry, merry, Christmas, and papa wiping his spectacles with suspicious persistency, and saying, "There, there, that will do! Why, you might still be babies."

Not a servant in the house was forgotten. Even the boy who cleaned the knives and polished the boots found his present lying ready directed beside his brushes, and a bright half-crown folded in tissue-paper for him to take home to his grandmother.

They all went to church, and after an early dinner spent a quiet cosy evening.

They never had much company on a Christmas-day; only their own, very own, people—mamma's sisters and brothers, and papa's only nephew and niece. There were no reconciliations, because there were no preceding quarrels; but all family ties seemed to be knit more closely upon each succeeding Christmas-day; and the children learnt from the looks they saw passing amongst their elders many and many a lesson, which served them in good stead when the time came for them to go out into the world, and to strive and keep their hearts unspotted by it.

Before they separated, Mr. Mason pressed into the hand of each person present a little note.

"It is only an invitation," he explained; and then went away, to let them read his words at their leisure.

"I want you all to do me the great favour of spending Twelfth-day at Martinly Hall," that was what the note said: "Mr. Montrelle will arrange about the journey, if you can do me this kindness."

Then there was a great cry.

He had not been jesting, then; something wonderful had happened, and papa was in the secret.

"And Molly too," added the boys.

"No," said Molly. "I know nothing; but I think there is something to know, and that papa knows it."

"And papa is not going to tell it," answered that gentleman. "However, I may inform you that a most wonderful Twelfth-cake is going to be ordered to-morrow, and that I for one mean to accept the invitation."

"You would like to know what has been done, and how Mrs. Wilkins took it all," remarked Mr. Ramsden to Ellen, when he asked to see her for a minute ere leaving town. "There is not going to be any trial or any prison or any punishment. We ought not, of course, to have shown mercy; but Mr. Mason's

heart is soft, and he found it easier to forgive your old mistress than to send her to gaol.

"I went down and had a quiet chat with her; remarked that we knew everything, even to the fact of her having vainly tried to insure her daughter's life. (I heard that quite accidentally, and it was refused because her lungs were hopelessly gone.)

"She is a wonderful old lady. She listened to me without saying a word till I had quite finished; then she asked,

"Can't you give me a fortnight? By that time Mrs. Mason will be transformed into Mrs. Glive."

"No," I answered, 'not an hour.'

"You will leave us our savings, at any rate?" she persisted.

"Yes," I said, 'we shall not interfere with them.'

"And you will keep it out of the newspapers?"

"I agreed to do that also, if she promised to make some excuse to the vicar at Purling for breaking off the match.

"If you like to live honestly for the future," I said, 'we will not prevent you doing so; but we shall not allow you to spoil any more lives—do you understand?'

"Miss Wilkins was even easier to manage. She reproached her aunt in no measured terms,

and wrote and signed a full confession of the rise and progress of the imposition. That is all I have to say about *them*. As for the rest, there will be a wedding in the spring, I hope, and a bride at Martinly, God bless her!"

As for the Twelfth-day at Martinly, was there ever such a Twelfth-day spent anywhere before or since? Such cartloads of holly, such piles of red berries, such miles of green wreaths, such lavish adornment of the old portraits, such fires, such logs of wood, such a welcome, such fare, such a cake, only eclipsed by one which was cut when the primroses were dotting the hedgerows, and the snowdrops blooming above the bare earth.

The master had come to his own, and not a heart could be so cold or envious as to refrain from wishing him joy.

And flitting about the dear old house, half-frightened, half-pleased, too simple to be over-elated, and yet too wise not to realise the magnitude of the change which had so suddenly been wrought, was that dear Miss Molly, who had, so her father said, made poverty seem sweeter to him, and who would enhance all the pleasures his riches could bring to the owner of Martinly.

"You are to keep the lodge, Ellen, if you

will," said Mr. Mason to Mrs. Calcey, pointing to a dear little house, built of dark stone, and covered all over with roses and creepers.

"And bring your mother and the children to live with you," supplemented Miss Molly.

But Ellen could not answer either of them for happy tears. She felt it would be easier for her to leave the cottage by the canal than to part from Miss Molly.

That was a Twelfth-day! It is remembered and talked about still in many a home, from which the shadows were lifted when the owner took up his residence in the house he had hitherto scarcely looked upon as his own.

CAPTAIN MAT'S WAGER.

THE wind was howling up Carrickfergus Lough. It had for days previously been blowing steadily from the north-east, and now there was such a gale rushing past the Gobbins on the one side and Donaghadee on the other, outward-bound vessels did not care to tempt that which the Channel might have in store for them, but lay snug in Belfast Harbour, or, lower down the Lough, rode at anchor as near shore as was safe and practicable.

Good fires, good company, good liquor, and a roof over his head will, however, go far to make a man comfortable in almost any weather, and on that stormy night, when it was blowing great guns along a treacherous coast, Mr. Peters, known to all in that country side as "the gauger," seated in the best parlour of widow Campbell's public-house, at Eden, near Carrickfergus, certainly did not enjoy the merits of a particularly strong tumbler of punch any the less because the waves in the Lough were

tossing like mad creatures, and there was no likelihood of any change in the weather, unless indeed that change might be for the worse, for twelve hours, at any rate. In such a gale, and with such a sea running, there was not a man in the north who would even think of trying to run a cargo, unless indeed it might be Captain Mat; and there in the flesh, and a good deal of it, sat Captain Mat before him partaking of his "tumbler" also, and judiciously abstaining from praising too loudly whisky which he was well aware had never paid the king sixpence.

The habits of all ranks were different then from what they are now. Life was simpler—no better perhaps, and probably not much worse than it is at the present time, but certainly not fettered by such hard and fast rules of expediency and propriety as harass the souls of easy-going people at this period of the world's history. For example, if in 1881 an officer of excise were known to spend his "off hours" in the society of a suspected smuggler—to meet him in public-houses, and hob-nob with him across a round deal table set close in front of a roaring fire, some one in authority would find a good deal to say on the subject; nay, possibly a member of Parliament might be found to stand up in the House, and inquire "if it were true,

as reported," &c. ; but sixty-five years ago, and even later, nobody troubled his head about such matters. A certain amount of work had to be done, and, providing it were done, a too rigid inquiry was never instituted as to the *modus operandi*. Besides, if Mr. Peters had consorted with those only who were guiltless of defrauding the revenue, he must either have remained solitary or sought the society of his own underlings. For it would have been very hard indeed in those days to find anyone who "rendered unto Cæsar the things that were Cæsar's" unless he was made to do so.

The popular feeling ran that it was right to cheat Cæsar ; and it is only due to the populace to say they devoted themselves to the cause they considered just with an ardour and constancy deserving of all praise.

Who was not either thief or receiver ?—who did not run cargoes, or take share of the spoil ?—who failed to wink at practices which assuredly could not be considered legal ? Indeed, it would be very hard to say. The ten righteous men Abraham sought for in Sodom, and sought in vain, were not more difficult to find than ten men on that coast who did not get something out of smuggling, in "meal or in malt."

* * * *

So far, Captain Mat had kept himself out of

reach of the law. He was a man who dealt in many things, and made his money by various expedients, some of which were perfectly harmless. He owned vessels—he owned houses—he owned land—he held a local appointment, which, it may be presumed, was not connected with Government—he was a keen politician, and always at election time made himself very busy on behalf of the Tory candidate! On such occasions he sold his vote, his services, and his influence at a high rate. He it was who, after having made a number of free and independent electors—who could not be bribed by the Orange side—drunk, conveyed them to the Copeland Islands, where, without a boat, he left the men to repent their contumacy till after the fight was over. Possessed of a most fertile brain, he proved invaluable to the party he favoured; and the stories he told of such periods convulsed Mr. Peters with laughter, and always—no matter how “contrary” things had gone in the day—sent him to his bed at night, when he was able to go to bed, in a better temper.

Mr. Peters was an Englishman, who had been sent to Carrickfergus to try if he could disperse the gang that eluded the vigilance of “gauger after gauger.” Things were done on that coast which seemed to the Government incredible,

except on the assumption that coastguardsmen and excisemen were in league with the enemy. Whisky, for example, placed in the king's stores, the locks of which were sealed with the king's seal, was found, when the doors were in due time opened, to contain water ; and it was well known that for years " poteen " had been openly conveyed into Belfast as " buttermilk."

About Mr. Peters' honesty there was no doubt ; but though he had come to the town with the full confidence of the authorities in his cleverness, and with the determination of sweeping the Lough clear of smugglers, so far the country side and himself and Government were precisely in the same condition as when he landed in Ireland.

Indeed, his presence was regarded rather as a good jest. The very beggars took his measure the first day he walked past the Court-house, the broad step of which building was a favourite resort of that numerous class.

" God help him, he's as soft as butter ! " they remarked ; while Captain Mat, after one apparently casual interview on the parade, declared the new comer to be " green as a gosling."

Chapters could scarcely contain an account of the practical jokes which were played off on the unfortunate man. He was deluged with " sure

information," which always proved incorrect; he was induced to go on fools' errands to all sorts of ridiculous places; he was kept up at night and harassed during the day; he was "warned" and he was "threatened;" taken by a "spy" to the Rocking Stone, in Island Magee, and left there at twelve o'clock p.m. to find his way home as best he could.

There was not an inch of the Commons, or the Knockagh, or the Cavehill, or the Whitehead, or the Gobbins, his weary feet had not been induced to tread; but he made no seizure. The thin blue smoke of the stills mocked him from afar—smoke which disappeared as by magic when he drew near. He forgot that if he watched, others were watching too—that, sharp though his eyes might be, other eyes were sharper, and that he had to deal with a population who, even for the sport of the thing, delighted in cheating him in his dual character as an English and an excise man.

But he was brave. Captain Mat himself, who did not know the meaning of fear, acknowledged that fact; and this quality, combined with an almost child-like credulity and a geniality which caused him to enjoy life and overlook many offences, induced the people to regard him, eventually, with a certain liking, that made them hope he would not run himself into any harm,

or force them, in self-defence, to "do him a damage."

By all parties it was clearly understood that if the best friends should happen, unfortunately to meet ranged on different sides, no quarter would be asked or given. On the part of the smugglers, there was no desire to kill anybody—quite the contrary—but they would kill if necessary. The Captain of the cutter *Firefly* had been found on the shore beyond Kilroot, shot dead; and Templecorran and Carrickfergus churchyards contained more than one grave where lay those who had fallen in hand-to-hand encounters along the coast; and thus Mr. Peters felt no doubt that even Captain Mat, if a necessity arose would stab him under the fifth rib or in any other part of his body; whilst he knew very well if he met the Captain in command of a party, he would shoot him like a dog, and feel no remorse for what he had done afterwards.

At that time the cholera was decimating the north of Ireland. Periodically epidemics must attack any population ill fed, badly clothed, wretchedly housed. In the towns the disease made of course greater ravages; but even in lonely homes on the hill-sides people were dying in a manner to appal the stoutest heart.

Captain Mat, by way of choosing a pleasant subject, was talking about the cholera.

"If the wind had set the other way, now," he remarked, "the disease might have a chance of blowing out to sea; but, as matters are, it will only get carried further inland, for the next gale from the south-west to bring back again. They have got it now at Lisburn, I hear; and a man was telling me he hears it has broken out in Armagh."

"It is dreadful to think of the people dying like cattle," said Mr. Peters. "Government ought to do something."

"King George is not the Almighty, so far as ever I heard," answered Captain Mat.

"That is true; but still do you not think if the sick were better cared for, and the houses cleansed, and good food and medicine supplied in proper time——"

"No, I don't," said the Captain, replying to the inference suggested by Mr. Peter's tone, if not actually by his words. "If dirt and starvation, if bad smells and overcrowding cause cholera now, why don't they always cause it? You may take my word, we know nothing about these visitations; what they are, why they come, why they go. I believe, myself, fear kills half the people; they have such a dread of the disease they die of the terror. Did you hear of the man in Ballymacaratt that made a bet he'd sleep in a bed where a boy had died of cholera?"

"No ; I did not."

"Well, he went to bed, and was found a corpse the next morning ; the fright did it ; for no one had died in the room of cholera or anything else. I'm not afraid myself."

"Neither am I," said Peters.

"Then you needn't trouble yourself about the cholera ; take some more punch, there's nothing better against infection than that. By-the-by, did you like the *butter* I sent you the other day ?"

"Then it was you," exclaimed Mr. Peters, setting down his tumbler and looking indignantly at the Captain. "I suspected as much."

"Was it to your mind?" asked Captain Mat, "*or had it too strong a flavour of the peat?*" and he laughed till the blackened rafters rang again.

"I do not think you would care to get me into trouble," said Mr. Peters, appealing to his companion's better nature, "at least, not for the sake of a mere jest ; and a thing of that sort, though only a joke to you, might not seem so amusing at The Castle. I took in the crock in good faith, believing it was butter."

"So it was," said the Captain.

"As far as it went ; but you know what it hid."

"Just the least taste of a sure cure for the

cholera. If a man drinks enough of that, I'll be bound he'll want neither doctor nor nurse again!"

"If ever I get the chance of paying you back, Captain, for all the tricks you have served me, I will give you your money with interest."

"You don't mean that," said Captain Mat.

"Yes I do ;" and there ensued a minute's silence, broken only by the noise made by the Captain slowly and meditatively stirring his punch.

"You're a clever fellow, Mr. Peters," he said at last.

"I am glad you think so," answered Mr. Peters, sulkily.

"But you're not so clever as I am."

"I am not up to your Irish ways yet, if that is what you mean; but wait a little. Once I get a fair chance——"

"Well, look here," observed the Captain ; "I'll give you a fair chance, and devil a bit of a trick in it. I'll bet you five pounds I'll take a hundred weight of tobacco down the High Street of Belfast any day you like to name, and you will never seize it."

"In one lot?" asked the Englishman.

"In one lot," agreed the Captain. "And, to make it all the easier for you, I'll say between Hercules Street and the Corn Market, not

earlier than ten in the morning and not later than three in the afternoon."

"Do you mean you will bring it round the corner of Hercules Place?"

"Yes, I'll fix it as near as that if you like."

"Done," said Mr. Peters.

"Then that is settled," remarked the Captain.

* * * *

At a quarter to ten on the day appointed Mr. Peters and three of his men were at the place named. It was not a bad locality for Captain Mat to have selected if he wanted to drive his opponent out of his mind; for, what with butchers' carts, carts laden with farm produce, private traps, timber waggons, jaunting cars, and all sorts of conveyances, the gauger soon found he had undertaken a gigantic task.

Curses loud and deep assailed the unfortunate exciseman; there was not an oath in the extensive repertory of the north of Ireland he had not launched at his head; but he held doggedly to his work, and when, at last, several of the conveyances began to turn along Rosemary Street, the labour of search grew lighter.

But about eleven a dreadful thing, for which he had not bargained, happened. While he was overhauling a cart filled with hay and a waggon piled high with sacks of flour, there emerged from Berry Street the rough convey-

ance which at that time collected the dead and bore them to places where they were buried, people feared to enquire how! On a plank placed above the bodies two villainous-looking men sat smoking short pipes; the horse was white, bespattered with mud; the tail-board was down, and from beneath the rough sacking thrown carelessly over the bodies one arm and foot were plainly visible — a gruesome spectacle.

That was not the worst of it, however; as the cart moved on the most frightful stench seemed literally jolted out of it—a loathsome, sickening smell, as of something in the last stage of decomposition, which scattered the bystanders and caused a regular stampede, even amongst the ragged urchins and beggars, whose olfactory organs could not have been supposed too sensitive.

When the cart drew near, there ensued a free fight between the carmen of the waggon and van, and those who were detaining them. Blows were exchanged without ceremony, and oaths such as might have pierced the heavens rose on the morning air. “Were honest men to stand there to be murdered? What was it supposed they had hid? If the Excise thought there was anything wrong, let them follow to the places they were going to deliver their hay

and flour, and not keep them there to be poisoned by the cholera stink."

There was an awful scrimmage for a minute, during the course of which Mr. Peters was knocked right up against the tailboard of the cart, when, to save himself from falling, he involuntarily stretched out his hand and seized a corpse by its ankle.

"I am a dead man," he thought, as a whiff of that awful stench poured down his throat. "Let them pass," he shouted to his satellites, "and two of you go with them."

"Will I get ye a drop o' whisky, Mister, dear?" asked a lad who was standing near. "Ye look fit to drop—and sure, no wonder. That was an awful smell."

"I thought they were not allowed to pass through the streets in the daytime?"

"Neither they were; but the people's dying so fast, they have to clear them away as they can."

"Where are they going now?" inquired Mr. Peters, watching with a horrible fascination the vehicle as it went at a good trot down the High Street.

"To Friar's Bush, yer Honour."

"But that's not the way to Friar's Bush."

"They have to go round by Arthur Square to take Mr. McCalley, who died this morning."

"Do you mean to say they take a man like Mr. McCalley to his grave in that fashion?"

"Troth do I—what's Mr. McCalley dead of the cholera better nor anybody else?"

Another hour wore on. Faint and sick, Mr. Peters bitterly repented having accepted such a wager. Another cholera cart might pass; the town authorities were furious; a riot might ensue; then the military would be ordered out; after that the Castle authorities were sure to send down to investigate the matter.

"Damn Captain Mat," thought Mr. Peters; and even as he delivered himself of this comminatory ejaculation, Captain Mat stood at his elbow.

"It's no good," he said, "waiting here any longer, they have turned the traffic; you may come away."

"Then you give up your bet, I suppose."

"We'll settle all that comfortably at Eden, to-night. Be sure you come."

"I'll come *if I'm alive*," answered Mr. Peters, gloomily; and, dispatching his men, he turned on his heel and walked away.

* * * *

"Now," said Captain Mat, standing before the fire, on which a kettle sputtered furiously, "I'll trouble you for that trifle of money."

"Why, you never took a pound of tobacco through the High Street to-day."

"Didn't I?"

"Not while I was there."

"Didn't I?"

"We searched every conveyance, from a donkey-cart to a carriage."

"Did you?"

"Yes; why do you laugh?"

"Because there was one you let pass."

"Not a single one."

"Not one going by way of the Corn Market to Friar's Bush?"

"You don't mean that, Captain?"

"Don't I?"

"But it was full of dead bodies!"

"No, it wasn't. There was only one dead man in it; all the rest was tobacco."

"Stowed away in the cholera cart?"

"It was not the cholera cart at all, though we produced a very good likeness of it. As for the man, he was killed falling off a ladder; and I offered to pay for the wake and the funeral, *if his friends would lend me the body for a few hours*. Bless you! I could have got twenty on the same terms."

"And who might the lad be that told me the cart was going round to Arthur Square to pick up Mr. McCalley?" asked the crestfallen gauger.

"A nephew of the deceased gentleman I hired for the occasion."

"And is Mr. McCalley dead?"

"No; he is as well as you are."

"And where did that dreadful smell come from?"

"Oh, we threw that in to *heighten the effect*."

"Well, I confess myself beaten," said Mr. Peters. I will pay you the five pounds to-morrow."

"I won't take it from you, my lad. I have had far more than five pounds' worth of fun out of the affair."

"You have some curious ideas of fun in Ireland," observed the Englishman.

"I wouldn't have done it *if you hadn't said you were not afraid of the cholera*," explained Captain Mat, demurely.

MARGARET DONNAN.

CHAPTER I.

NOT far from the ancient city of Carrickfergus, a little off the shore road leading to Kilroot, Templecorran, Island Magee, Larne, and thence on northward to the Giant's Causeway, lay, some forty years since, close down on the very margin of the lough, a mere cluster of cottages, called, in the semi-Scotch dialect of that part of Ireland, "Bonny-before."

Never was name better deserved, for a lovelier expanse of sea, a fairer sweep of shore, it would have been difficult to find. On the other side of the lough, over the blue of the water, lay the green hills, under which nestle Holywood and Bangor ; while, further still, from the depths of the county of Down, rose the Mourne Mountains. Nearer Belfast, beyond the grey old castle, jutting on its rocky foundations so grandly out into the sea, were to be seen the soft outlines of the Knockagh, the Cave Hill, and finally, higher

than both, the blue of Devis mingling with the sky.

What that stretch of coast may look like now, when railways are striding all over the country and changing the whole face of nature, it would be difficult for me to say; but in the old "long ago" it was a lonely land, sparsely inhabited by a hardy, stalwart, honest, industrious, independent population, poor as they were brave, full of tenderness and piety and poetry as their lives were bare of luxury, and terribly practical.

They were a wonderful race of men, mated to women as honest and enduring as themselves. They went down into the sea and saw the wonders of the deep. They were learned in all nautical mysteries needful to be acquired on so rugged and treacherous a coast—could perceive sudden squalls coming down from amid the hills and sweeping along the surface of the deceitful lough long ere they broke upon their boats—they knew every rock on the coast, every sand-bank in the bay; but all their knowledge and all their seamanship proved sometimes ineffectual to bring them safe to land; and many a grey headstone, or more frequently simply a swelling mound in the graveyards round and about, bore sorrowful memory to the fate of father, husband, brother, or son, who, having left his home strong and hearty, came back no more—till he was carried

thither, his rough pea-jacket wet with the last salt spray which should ever touch him, his rugged face quiet in death, his hair full of sand and seaweed, and his brave, loving, God-fearing heart at peace for ever more.

About the lives of those men there was an infinite pathos. Their pleasures were so few, their dangers so constant, their privations so many, their work so incessant, that their features wore a gravity strange to those unacquainted with the perils they encountered, the hardships they endured—a gravity which was reflected in the countenances of their wives, and lurked in the dimples and mingled with the laughter of even their youngest children.

Yet no question existence held deep, passionate pleasures for natures so exceptional, fashioned in so stern a mould. Their love of country—of home—of parents, children, wives—of the sea, which gave them the means of subsistence, and often provided them with a grave—would have seemed almost incredible to those unaware that the narrower a man's possessions, the stronger his attachment for them generally grows. They had a wild, fervent, silent appreciation of the beautiful; and the sea talked to their hearts as no human being could ever have done—whether bathed in golden glory when the sun was setting behind

the Cave Hill, or dancing in the light of a summer's morning, or lying quiet in the depths of silvery brightness under the moon's rays, or sullen as November skies, or tossing wildly in its terrible unrest.

Yes, they loved it; though oftentimes a cruel mother, it had lullabied their infancy, nursed them on its breast, fed them, clothed them, provided (directly or indirectly) all of interest, pleasure, and excitement their poor lives held. The children waded in the water and played with the waves; they lay in the fish-creels, and they sat on the ground at their father's feet while he mended the nets he hoped to bring back full of fish, which he was just then beginning to complain steam-boats were frightening from their feeding grounds.

The White Quay at Carrickfergus (so called because it was white, and further to distinguish it from the Town Quay, lying under the shadow of the old Castle, where at the landing-steps is shown the stone on which William the Third first set foot in Ireland) was the favourite anchorage for the fishing craft; and no prettier sight can be imagined than to see a little fleet of them set sail on summer evenings for the distant Gobbins, or any other well-known haunt, the lumbering boats—built to withstand rough seas and wild tempests—picturesque

when viewed from a short distance—the sails dressed with tan, glowing red in the beams of the setting sun—the men busy at the rudder, and tacking to avail themselves of every breath of wind—the Castle, on its rocky foundations, looking grand and grim and grey, and apparently unconscious of the softened and beautiful reflection of itself lying quiet in the depths of the glassy water beneath—the green hills on the opposite side of the lough giving so peaceful and homelike a touch to the landscape, green hills dotted here and there with whitewashed cottages.

A striking scene in its peaceful repose; and none the less striking to the beholder, who knew that each man on board those boats, casting off so cheerily, held his life in his hand—that an hour or two might find the whole aspect of nature changed—storm in lieu of sunshine, rolling waves where the reflection of the Castle now lay unbroken; crested billows dashing against the high sea-wall; the green hills blotted out from view; the Knockagh and its fellows shrouded in thick mist; a grey sky looking down on an angry sea; and wives with little children clinging, frightened, to their skirts, straining their eyes to catch sight of any returning craft which might bring news of the whereabouts and safety of its fellows.

As in war there are always families who lose more of their bravest and best than others, so in the midst of this humble seafaring community were households set, after a fashion, apart, and regarded reverently by reason of the afflictions wherewith God had seen fit to visit them.

In the hamlet mentioned, lying not far from that poor mean little quarter of Carrickfergus then called The Green—though there was nothing rural left about its appearance save a towering maypole—a quarter inhabited almost exclusively by fishermen, there lived one woman who seemed to have been especially marked for misfortune.

Her name was Margaret Donnan. To have looked in her wrinkled, weatherbeaten face, to have considered her coarse dress, to have watched her countenance when she stood meekly aside while the “gentlefolk,” passing in their carriages or galloping along the muddy roads, splashed her patched garments, to have seen the humble deference with which she curtsied to her betters, no stranger would have imagined her to be made of the finest material out of which heroines are formed. And yet this is but the simplest statement of a true case. She had suffered as few women suffer, she had borne as few women do, struggled as fewer women can. Cold, damp, privations,

long vigils, days of hunger, nights of weeping, had made her, years previously, older than her age ; and it was difficult to imagine she ever could have been a beautiful woman.

In her youth, however, in her girlhood and her early married life, she was one of the loveliest girls possible—straight as a dart, lithe as a willow, active as a fawn, with eyes deep, dark, lustrous, a delicate rose tint in her cheeks, teeth white and regular, lips like cherries, said her admirers, and a brow whiter than any lily. When she unbound her black, glossy hair, it fell in wavy masses of undulating crispness almost to her knees. Her neck was well set on her shoulders. She had a small, straight nose, a short upper lip, a rounded chin, ears like delicate sea-shells, and a laugh clear and joyous and happy.

At that time she was Maggie Harrigan, with plenty of suitors, each one anxious to change that name for his own. Some were handsome ; some, for their station, well to do. One even owned a small freehold and a slated cottage ; but the girl passed them all by and put her hand into that of Robert Donnan, which was held out, doubtfully and as if its owner were half in terror of his boldness, for her to take.

She never repented her choice. Through weal and through woe, through the short summer, and the long, long winter to follow,

she never wished herself unwed. When she was hungry she had no regrets for the fleshpots of Egypt. When she laid him dead in his coffin, she felt she would not have exchanged him for any man living.

He lost his life "as a man should," was his unwritten epitaph, graven on the hearts of his fellows.

He was trying to save the lives of others ; "but he had not rightly got his strength after the fever, and he was weak for want of nourishing food ;" and so, when the wild waves washed him out of the boat, he could not withstand their violence, and, after one ineffectual struggle, sank to rise no more. Before he went, however, six sons had preceded him into the Silent Land ; and, the most awful misfortune which could befall such a man, he lost his only daughter.

Had she died he would not have counted her lost ; but as things were he did not know, he "could not tell," he "feared the worst," he "could not hope at all."

The girl said she was married ; but God above alone knew.

No, he had never seen her since the night she went away.

"And how she could go," he said, "beats me altogether."

This was the strongest expression of anger he ever uttered on the subject, and, save when anyone probed the wound, it might have been thought he failed to feel the smart. But his wife knew—by the light of her own heart she read his, and could tell what he was thinking about when he walked, with head drooping, solitary beside the shore, and did not answer immediately he was spoken to when mending his nets, and looked with sad, sorrowful eyes at any little dark-eyed girl who smiled up in his face, and sat in the house smoking by himself when his fellow-fishers were lounging about the shore or lying on the shingle talking over such odds and ends of gossip as floated like other worthless flotsam and jetsam adown the narrow channel of their lives.

It was the evening of the day when he had been laid to sleep in that lovely burying-ground on the road to Raloo, belonging to the Covenanters, and his wife sat all alone in the cottage with its gable turned towards the sea, where, during the whole of her married life, she had never felt solitary before, though oftentimes sorry, and sometimes sick.

The neighbours who would fain have kept her company were gone—one to look after her children, another to see to her bedridden mother, a third to get ready her husband's

tea—they were forced to leave her, and Margaret was not grieved so to be left.

In the silence of the mystical twilight she felt her dead more present with her than when there was what she called a “stir of strange voices” about.

She rose and paced the earthen floor his feet would never tread again ; she looked out of the small window whence she might see the familiar figure returning to his home—no more ; her eyes fell on the rude fireplace, the leaping blaze from which had always greeted his coming, and then they wandered to the wheel she had been wont to twirl so fast when flax came, bought by the money rich English people sent in bad seasons to replace the nets lost in the storms, or rent by the steamers when they had to hug the shore.

Ah ! she might spin again, but not for him ! He would never sit again beside the fire, or in the doorway in the sunlight making his nets. He was gone, and she left alone—alone—alone.

As she thought of the new-made grave on the hillside, of the mournful resting-place up beyond “The Commons,” where the silence was unbroken even by the rippling of the waves, or the wash of the sea fretting over the pebbly shore, her tears welled up afresh, and, covering

her face with both hands, she cried as if her very heart would break.

She was so buried in her grief that she did not at first hear a knocking at the front door, which opened directly out of the kitchen on to a "causeway" of stones, laid down roughly to form a sort of footpath from the street.

It was repeated twice ere it caught her usually quick ear, now dulled by sorrow; but then she crossed the kitchen, pushed back the bar she had put up, and opened the door, expecting to see her only living son, or one of the neighbours.

Instead, however, of any person, gentle or simple, with whom she was acquainted, there stood on the threshold a total stranger, a well-dressed man, carrying in his arms a child, and followed by a little boy.

"Does Mrs. Donnan live here?" he asked; and she knew instantly, as she said afterwards, "he was a 'foreigner' by his tongue.

"I am Mrs. Donnan," she answered, in a voice heavy with weeping.

"May I come in?" he said.

"Surely, sir, though it is a sorrowful house you are entering. I have buried my husband to-day," she went on, with a touching quiver in her words. "Will you be pleased to sit down off your feet, sir," she added, dusting a chair,

and setting it forward for the stranger, who stood, looking grave and grim, in the fitful firelight.

"No; I won't sit down, thank you," he said, glancing as he spoke curiously round the poor cabin; at the rude furniture; at the dresser, set out with a few plates and basins; at the nets hanging against the wall; at the earthen floor; at the absence of everything he had been accustomed to consider the mere necessities of life. "You had a daughter once, I think?"

She looked at the children, and understood now what was coming, what had come, but she only answered, "Yes, sir."

"She went off with a young officer stationed at Belfast?"

"That was so, sir."

"She died some time ago?"

"Five years come Martinmas. Five long years. Sir, did you know her?"

"These are her children," he said, not answering the question she put.

"And where is their father?" she asked.

"He is dead, too;" and as he spoke the stranger laid the child he carried on a settle beside the fire. "She is fast asleep," he added, turning with a relieved look towards the newly-made widow, and apparently considering the worst part of his errand was done.

"Are you going to leave them here?" she asked.

"Of course; there is nowhere else for them to go."

"And who sends them here—who are you?" There was a ring of defiance in her tone, and a light in her eyes in which a few minutes before tears had been glistening, that warned the visitor it would be wise to bring the interview to a close.

Before he answered, he came close up to the only table the kitchen boasted, and, putting his hand in the breast pocket of his coat, drew out a purse.

From it he extracted a piece of folded paper, which he held in his fingers as he spoke.

"I am butler in the family of General Pryor; and his wife, Lady Lucy, bade me bring the boy and girl to their grandmother, and give you this hundred-pound note she sends—not because my Lady recognises any claim your daughter's children can possibly have upon her, but only out of her ladyship's goodness and consideration."

Saying which he laid the note down, walked to the door, opened it, and went out into the night.

For a few seconds Margaret Donnan stood stunned; then, catching sight of the money,

she snatched up the note and rushed after Lady Lucy's messenger.

He must have walked very fast, for he had passed through the hamlet and got to the top of the short lane leading to the high road, and was about to enter a post-chaise, which waited for him, when she came up panting and breathless.

"Stop!" she said to the postilion; and she put her arm inside the door to prevent its being closed against her. "Here is your money," she went on speaking to General Pryor's butler. "Your mistress may be a great lady, but she is a bad woman. Whether my daughter was wronged or not, God only knows. She said she was married; but, however that may be, I'll take no money from one of your people. Does she think to pay me for my child's shame?"

The bank-note fluttered to the bottom of the chaise. She took away her arm, and, banging the door, turned the handle. "You may go on now," she cried to the postilion; and then she set her face towards the sea, and went down the narrow lane, sobbing every step of the way. She could not control her grief even when she re-entered her cabin, but sat down beside the table, weeping as she had not wept when she saw her husband brought home dead and knelt beside his coffin.

Presently there came the soft touch of a child's hand upon her own—the timid voice of a child in her ear.

“Don't cry ; please, please don't cry ;” and two little arms were twined about her neck ; and, looking up, she saw that a boy with a face like an angel was mingling his tears with hers.

“Mother,” said a third person at this juncture, “what has happened? Whose children are these?” and a great strapping fellow closed the door and strode across the room.

“Maggie's,” she answered. “The father's dead, and his people will have none of them, and they have sent them home to bring disgrace on us all ; and the man that brought them wanted to leave a hundred-pound note, but I'd have none of it. I ran after him and gave it back, and told him to tell his Lady Lucy I would not take her money as the price of my daughter's shame.

“Hush !” said the young man, sternly. “I would not speak like that if I was you, and before the innocent children, too. I am glad you did not keep the money though,” he added, in a different tone. “We'll make shift not to let them want, somehow, please God. Who can tell? It will, maybe, turn out, somehow, they have come as blessings in disguise. What

do they call you, my lad?" he asked, turning to the boy.

"My name is Norman," answered the child; "and this is Maggie, and she is always crying for her papa."

CHAPTER II.

MORE than a year had passed since the day of Robert Donnan's funeral, and it was the very height of summer when widow Donnan and one of her neighbours set out for a farmhouse near Bella Hill, where their services were engaged for the day.

"Then you'll be a good boy, Norman?" she said, before she went.

"Aye, Granny."

"Good boys don't say, 'Aye.' What do they say?"

"Yes, Granny;" this shyly, and with a pretty drooping of the fair curly head.

"And you'll take care of Maggie?"

"Yes, Granny," with a smile, as if the idea of not taking care of Maggie was the finest joke imaginable.

"And you'll go to your school and take your 'piece' with you; and you know where to find the key when you come back, and there is milk on the shelf and some griddle-bread

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"My name is Norman," answered the child; "and this is Maggie, and she is always crying for her papa."

CHAPTER II.

MORE than a year had passed since the day of Robert Donnan's funeral, and it was the very height of summer when widow Donnan and one of her neighbours set out for a farmhouse near Bella Hill, where their services were engaged for the day.

"Then you'll be a good boy, Norman?" she said, before she went.

"Aye, Granny."

"Good boys don't say, 'Aye.' What do they say?"

"Yes, Granny;" this shyly, and with a pretty drooping of the fair curly head.

"And you'll take care of Maggie?"

"Yes, Granny," with a smile, as if the idea of not taking care of Maggie was the finest joke imaginable.

"And you'll go to your school and take your 'piece' with you; and you know where to find the key when you come back, and there is milk on the shelf and some griddle-bread

to keep them; but she managed it somehow, with occasional help from her son, who had his wife and family also to maintain, and now and then a tidy frock or piece of flannel or a few yards of calico from some one of the kind ladies who lived in Carrickfergus and its neighbourhood. There was no disgrace about accepting such gifts bestowed as simple matters of course by those who were better off on those who were worse.

Nothing to hurt the pride of the latter, or to flatter the vanity of the former. Margaret Donnan had no heart throe when she dressed her little grandchild in some garment Miss at one of the big houses had outgrown. She would not have asked for such help; but when it came as it did, like the rain or the dew or the sunshine, she took it and felt thankful.

So far as she knew how, she tried to prevent the children deteriorating in speech or manner. She trained them more like a conscientious nurse than a grandmother. She was eager for them to learn, anxious for them to keep their pretty ways. Poor soul! it was touching to watch her striving to make the best of their poor clothes, rebuking them for solecisms of language, bidding them behave nicely.

Ah! who knew? Far down in the depths of her lonely heart she perhaps nourished a hope they might some day emerge from obscurity and require those words and manners the gentry thought so much of. She could not write herself, but she felt proud when her grandson showed her a fair copy, and she was very glad to find it embodied St. Paul's statement—"Evil communications corrupt good manners," a truism she immediately indorsed with a pointed and uncomplimentary reference to her *bête noire*, Willie Craig, who was at once the ne'er-do-well of the hamlet and the haunting horror of her life.

He had seduced her grandson to the giddy heights of the Gobbins, and frightened Maggie almost to death in the dark laurel-shaded alleys of Kilroot. If there was any mischief going, he was either ringleader or sole perpetrator. Various, he was styled "a young devil," "a limb," "an imp," "a heartbreak," according to the taste and sex of the speaker. He exercised a fascination over his companions a better lad might have tried in vain to gain. Though Norman was not fond of him he admired him with admiration bordering upon fear.

But Mrs. Donnan's mind was at ease about

Willie Craig as she trudged northward. Her grandson had promised to be good, and not allow himself to be drawn away by that arch enemy of mankind.

"And you may be just *sure* of that boy," said the poor woman to her companion; "if he says he will do a thing, more especially when he has his sister to take care of. It's wonderful the love they bear one another."

School was over; the long summer day wore on apace. The children ran home and ate their oaten cake, and drank the milk left for them, and learned their lessons side by side, and then started. The tide was ebbing slowly from the shore.

As they went Willie Craig met and vainly tried to seduce them to go with him and steal some fruit from a garden he had been reconnoitring.

"There is only a hedge," he explained, "and the people are all away for the day to Belfast; and there are big amber gooseberries, and strawberries, and raspberries, and currants; and there is a tree of apples nearly ripe, and white cherries. Come along. I'll go in; and you need only look on."

But they would not go. The boy held his sister's hand a little tighter as he saw her eyes open when one delicacy after another

was mentioned in a way to tempt the heart of any child.

"I promised Granny," he said, shortly. "Come, Maggie, and we'll look for alabaster."

They went far out on the dark sands to the place where the alabaster was found. They picked up mussels, and perriwinkles, and little crabs, and shells, and pebbles; they waded through shallow pools, and plashed in the very margin of the water; they piled up sand and called their mound a castle; they wrote letters for the sea to obliterate; then when they grew hungry they ran home and would have had some more oat-cake, but that a kindly neighbour who was baking griddle-bread called the children in and gave them each a "bannock" buttered hot, and a basin of new milk fresh from the cow.

By the time their simple meal was finished the tide was flowing, so they did not go out again upon the sands. Surely, swiftly, the water was coming in, covering the alabaster pits, and the shell-fish, and their splendid castle, and their initials, and the prints of their childish feet.

"We'll go a bit along the shore, Maggie," said the boy; and so they went, their faces set eastward, and the glory of the western sky shining like molten gold behind them—on, and still on, till they rounded the nearest point and came

to a tiny bay, or rather indent of the shore, where they seated themselves on a huge stone.

"That's the gentleman's nice boat," remarked Maggie, pointing to a yawl drawn up on the beach—a yawl newly painted red and white and green—affording a strong contrast to the dark, dingy-looking fishing-smacks the child knew best.

"Yes ; should you like to look at it close?"

She got up instantly and put her little hand in his.

"One, two, three—and away we go," cried the boy ; and away they did go : arrows from a bow could not have sped more swiftly.

They examined the pretty boat all over. She lay high and dry at the moment, but, in view of the flowing tide, was moored to a ring sunk in a rock close by the bank. Upon this rock the children climbed ; then they clambered into the boat, and sat for a while in the bows stealing a fearful joy—for they knew they ought not to be there—and somehow the earth and the sea and the sky looked different in consequence. After a little they got down into her bottom so as to be screened from observation, and then all at once Maggie's eyes grew heavy, closed, and she fell asleep.

But a poor little baby after all—only six years of age, guarded by a boy who had lived in this

world scarce two years more. He watched her a short time, then his own head sank, and, lying with the rays of the setting sun falling full athwart them, the brother and sister wandered through dreamland side by side. They had not been long asleep before a face peeped over the gunwale of the boat.

"I'll give you young ones a fright," said the owner of it, and with quick deft fingers Master Willie Craig loosened the rope, which attached the boat to her moorings, and, laughing low and mischievously, sat down at a little distance to watch. Ere long, however, he found it slow work waiting for the coming of the tide, and ran on to meet the waves as, grandly, and with a majestic leisure, they swept in upon the shore. Then he went a little westward, keeping just where the water, as it lapped in over the sand, could wet his feet. When this amusement palled he began to feel hungry, and thought he would go home and get a piece of bread, by which time the sea would be flowing in nicely, and getting quite close up to the boat.

The sun was sinking to rest behind the distant hills: the water looked under his beams like a sheet of molten gold. Some vessels were lying almost becalmed over towards the county Down side of the lough; the green heights on the opposite shore seemed fair to those gazing upon

them from the county Antrim; the quiet twilight came on apace; the little hamlet sank into repose, and still the children slept on whilst the sea crept nearer and nearer—came crawling surely, if slowly, across the sands, covering the pebbles and shells, up the shingle, over the large stones, almost to the very bank where, amongst grass and nettles, wild flowers grew.

When they woke it was dark, and they were not safe with Granny at home. For a moment they did not realise where they were; but after he had rubbed his eyes the boy said,

“We fell asleep in the yawl, Maggie. Wake up, dear; we must make haste and run back.”

As he spoke, he rose and found the boat rocking under them. “The tide has got round it,” he thought; and laid a hand on Maggie to prevent her clambering out.

“Wait a minute!” he exclaimed, “till I go first;” and he scrambled to the bows and began feeling for the rope. It was there, but offered no resistance to his touch. He could see no rock, no bank, no anything, but water all around. The tide had come up, and the yawl was parted from her moorings, and they were afloat—two little waifs upon the desolate sea.

CHAPTER III.

THE English steamer was just entering the lough, making her way against an ebb tide, when the look-out reported that far to starboard an empty boat was drifting down towards the Channel. No lovelier morning had ever dawned upon the earth. The sun streamed over the varied scenery which makes all that coast seem but a perpetual panorama of striking contrasts.

As usual, the steward and stewardess had informed the passengers, "We are now in the lough;" and already in the cabins dressing operations were in full progress; whilst very experienced travellers had for some time been walking up and down the quarter-deck and getting all the benefit to be derived from the very early morning air.

"An empty boat!" In a moment glasses were raking the horizon. Far away lay the gloomy Gobbins, with its thousands and thousands of seagulls dotting each rocky projection and winging their flight to the little island lying close beside. On the one hand the coast swept off northward towards Larne; on the other, the most desolate portion of the county of Down stretched bleak and barren into the sea.

At its entrance the lough is very wide; and

as the English steamer, according to its wont, hugged the southern side, the frail bark drifting out into the Channel looked a mere speck upon that glorious expanse of sea.

"She is not empty"—it was the pilot who spoke. He had not long come aboard, and his craft with the black spot on the white sail was being towed astern. "I see a signal flying. Look! lower, lower—sink the glass a bit more! There! Do you make it out now?"

In a minute the steamer's course was altered, and right across the lough those on land beheld her smoke disappearing as she bore fast down towards the Antrim coast, getting into the route which should have previously been traversed by the Scotch boat, had she not chanced to be late.

By this time the deck was crowded with passengers; every available glass had been put in requisition. As the steamer gained upon the little craft, the excitement on board became more and more intense; and when at last the mate said, "Why, there's two children in her!" there came a hush of suspense while the vessel rushed through the water, and orders were given for a boat to be lowered and manned the instant the paddles stopped.

How those sailors rowed! Was ever any sight fairer than the sweep of their oars as they pulled faster and faster? the spectators

could see they almost lifted the boat out of the water with every stroke; the spray glistened like drops from a fountain as it dripped in prismatic colours from their oars. They were close on the yawl now, they shot ahead, and then waited for it to come abreast; one of the men laid hold of the gunwale, while another made fast the rope. With their strong arms they lifted the children into their own boat.

A cheer rang out from the steamer across the glittering water. Hats were waved, handkerchiefs floated in the light summer breeze. A few minutes more and two little creatures rescued from the jaws of death stood upon the deck of the steamer surrounded by a group of eager questioners.

They did not appear very much frightened. The boy looked somewhat pale, and there were dark circles round his eyes; but the girl, with her sun-bonnet pulled well over her pretty little face, only seemed abashed to find herself among so many people, and stood tracing patterns nervously with a bare pink toe, as if she were standing on the familiar sands once more.

The boy told his story—how their grandmother had gone away for the day, and how when evening came they climbed into the boat and fell asleep, and never woke till it was dark night and nothing all about but water, how he

shouted till he was hoarse, how he knew they floated up the lough because he saw the lights of the cutter anchored off Carrickfergus, and the Castle and the shadow of the Knockagh; and then when the tide turned they turned with it, drifting with the currents, but ever and always getting towards the open sea.

"I was glad," he said, simply, "when day began to break. I thought then somebody might see us."

"But through all those hours of darkness what did you do, or think of?" he was asked, which question he failed to answer; he looked down for a moment, and then out seaward, with a wistful trouble in his face more eloquent than words.

"Were not *you* frightened, dear?" said a lady to the little girl. She lifted her head, and under the battered sun-bonnet were seen such a pair of lovely eyes, such a rose tint in the round, velvety cheeks, such pearls of teeth within the sweet childish mouth, that a murmur of admiration went round.

"No," she answered, shyly, with a beautiful smile.

"She thought she was going to see her papa," explained the boy; "didn't you, Maggie?"

"Yes." And she turned to him with a smile lighting up her whole face.

"And where *is* her papa?" someone inquired; but again the boy made no reply; he only took the little sunburnt hand and held it tightly in his own.

"Sure they're two poor desolate orphans," said a sailor in the background at this juncture. "I have seen them often, the creatures. They live with their old grandmother, and more shame for them as threw such a burden on a woman who had a handful of trouble without having to work for a pair of helpless infants."

It was the mate who spoke; he came from Eden, a village somewhat further on the road to Larne, and had the whole story pat enough.

He told it, when pressed, briefly and yet dramatically; he pictured the widow sitting in her lonely home and the servant of the proud, heartless lady breaking in on her sorrow with the children and the hundred-pound note, "which she threw into the chaise after him as if it was dirt."

"And there's many a one believes the father and mother was married," he finished; "and that, if anyone could see into the matter, the children might get their rights."

"Meantime, it is very hard upon the old grandmother," said a kindly-faced gentleman; "and so I propose that we make up a little sum to send her. If you, Sir," addressing the

Captain, "will take charge of whatever may be subscribed, you may put me down for five guineas." There was quite an eager stir amongst the passengers (long before the children had been taken down into the cabin to have some breakfast); it was evident those on deck did not mean them to be landed at Carrickfergus empty handed. At that moment an elderly, military-looking man, who had taken no part in the conversation, asked the Captain if he could speak to him alone for a moment.

They walked astern, and when they were near the wheel the Captain paused and said, stiffly, "Yes, Sir?"

"I do not want you to take any money from those people. Stop the collection."

"I don't see how I can do anything of the sort, Sir," was the answer; "and, to be plain with you, I don't see why I should."

"I can tell you why," said the other, his features working with irrepressible emotion; "because the dead father that innocent child believed she should so soon see, was my son."

"Whew!" said the Captain, with a long whistle of amazement, and plunging his hands deep into his pockets he took a few turns in order to tranquillise ' . . .

"I was on my
went on General

is Mrs. Donnan,"
children were

sent to her without my knowledge. Till quite lately I knew nothing about them, or of their father's marriage——”

“Then the girl was married—that's a good thing,” said the Captain, and his face grew radiant with pleasure.

“Set me ashore with the children, and then explain how matters stand to your passengers.”

“I will, Sir, with the greatest pleasure.”

“Thank you,” said General Pryor, and he put out his hand and shook the Captain's thankfully.

* * * *

Margaret Donnan sat over the fireless hearth rocking herself backwards and forwards, and mourning as one who could not be comforted. No trace or tiding of the children! She had sought them high, she had sought them low; all the neighbours had joined in the quest; all the children had scoured the shore; and then, somehow, the truth leaked out, and Willie Craig, frightened and repentant, told his story of how he had loosed the rope to give Norman and Maggie a fright, and then gone away and forgotten all about them.

Very soon there were willing hearts and strong arms shoving out boats to go in search of the children, but Margaret herself felt hopeless.

“First one, then another,” she muttered; “and now Maggie gone, and her brother, too.”

But at that moment there came a rush of rapid footsteps over the earthen floor.

"Granny, Granny, Granny!" said the boy, throwing his arms round her neck and bursting into a flood of tears. "We are here, both of us; Maggie is behind with a gentleman who says he is our papa's father."

Even as the boy spoke his grandfather entered, leading Maggie by the hand, and stood uncovered in the middle of the earthen floor, a stately gentleman. Obedient to her lifelong instinct of respect for her betters, Margaret Donnan arose when she saw him, but there was an angry defiance in her voice as she said—

"You have come to take the children from me, I suppose?"

"No," he answered; "I have come to ask forgiveness for me and mine—to say your daughter was my son's lawful wife, and that having heard the story of your unselfishness and your devotion, I am here to tell you the children shall stay with you or be taken by me, just as you decide."

She remained for a minute silent—the sunshine streaming through the open door glorifying her humble dress, and shining on her tear-stained face, lifted in grateful thanksgiving to Heaven; then she said—

"You have brought me more, Sir, than

houses or lands—the good name of my dead daughter. May God Almighty bless you for it. No; I won't stand in the children's way. If it is for their welfare, I can part with them; though ——” She turned aside and went out into the bright morning, sobbing bitterly.

* * * *

Space will not permit me to tell of all the prosperous sunshine which flooded the evening of that honest life. General Pryor took the children; but year by year he brought them back to visit their grandmother in the cottage he bought for her, a cottage covered with roses and jasmine and set upon a little knoll, which commanded a view of the lough and the County Down, the hills softly blending with the sky, and the castle stretching out into the sea, and all the fair country round about. She lived to see Maggie's husband and Norman's wife, and to hear Willie Craig—that “terribly bad boy,” as the neighbours called him, whom she had taken to her own home when all his own friends died in the time of a virulent fever—say, “I am captain of a schooner now, Mrs. Donnan, and what I am and all I possess in the world I owe to you.”

MISS MOLLOY'S MISHAP.

CHAPTER I.

KINGSCASTLE is situated on the north-east coast of Ireland. It does not lie exactly on any part of the Channel, but forms a picturesque object in a picturesque landscape, about midway up King's Bay. At the head of the Bay or Lough, as it is locally termed, stands Williams-pass—named after him of pious and immortal memory, in whose time there was scarcely a house built on the swamp whence now the capital of Ulster—the richest and the most populous town in the sister island, with the exception, perhaps, of Dublin—sends the goods produced in its thousand factories all over the world.

Up to the time of King William's landing, Kingscastle and the lough were known by a different name; but when he first set foot on a broad stone under the shadow of the grand old castle, the people, grateful to be delivered from "Papacy, Prelacy, bad money, and wooden shoes," hailed him with effusion, and forthwith

re-christened. their ancient city—for it was a city then before Williams-pass was thought of—just as it is a city still, while its great rival, containing at least twenty times the number of inhabitants, has not yet attained to the dignity of that title.

Seventy-five years ago Kingscastle was a place of more importance than it is now. The assizes were held there both for the County of Antrim and the County of the Town of Kingscastle. Twice a year the judges were, with all due pomp, ushered into the borough by the high sheriffs of their respective counties, accompanied by a fitting retinue. There was a gaol—there was a gallows—the castle held a garrison—vessels of a good tonnage could and did discharge their cargoes at the quay—there were several excellent inns, and, last but not least, there were pretty women; for which product (and himself and buttermilk) a local historian, breaking forth into rhyme, declares the place still celebrated.

There were plenty of pretty women to be met with in and around Kingscastle three-quarters of a century ago, but this tale has nothing to do with them. No one considered Miss Molloy beautiful. In the candid speech of the populace she was called “wonderful ordinary,” though perhaps if her lot had

been cast in the present day she might have more than passed muster.

And yet everyone wondered Miss Molloy did not "get married." She had been eligible for a long time. She was known to be a notable housekeeper, a good manager, and to stand the chance of having a "fine fortune," maybe—"it was reported as much as six thousand pounds." Pounds were scarce if women were plenty at Kingscastle. Why, therefore, did Miss Molloy hang fire?

It was extremely hard to say—other girls got married. Scotchmen and even Englishmen took them away. They wedded husbands from the County Down, and Dublin, and Derry, and the remoter parts of Ireland. They settled well near Williams-pass—one after another Miss Molloy's schoolfellows were persuaded to go to the old parish church, filled with "noble monuments," and adopt a stranger's name—but she remained. She went to see them all married, but nobody asked her to stop and be married too.

She had lived five-and-twenty summers. She had lived thirty summers, perhaps one or two more, and no chance came her way of changing her condition. In those days a woman of thirty was thought immensely old, particularly in the rank of life wherewith Miss Molloy felt quite

content. Courtship was not in her case likely to be fenced about with much etiquette or many difficulties; but lovers did not come to woo.

Miss Molloy considered the fault lay with her father, whom she called "dada." Till she was a good deal past her thirtieth year the Captain did not know what to think. The lady's theory was that if he would only say the amount he meant to give her she could soon settle herself comfortably. Her "dada" smoked pounds of tobacco over the question without coming to any satisfactory conclusion. He wanted her to get married. He had special reasons for desiring to see her in a house of her own, but he could not blind himself to the fact that his wishes seemed destined to remain unfulfilled.

"I can't make it out," he said one evening to a friend when the question came on the carpet; "other girls mostly have *one* chance, but I don't believe Molly ever had an offer."

"Do you not think, dear Captain Molloy," suggested the friend, "that it is her *nose*?"

Ladies who had known the Captain all their lives were in the habit of calling him "Captain, dear;" but this lady—his friend was of the gentler sex—could not have even thought of a mode of address so utterly unrefined. Mrs. Sanson was extremely "genteel."

"It is just wonderful how genteel she is,"

declared Captain Molloy to some of her late husband's boon companions, who could remember occasions on which Major Sanson's conduct was perfectly free from any failing of that sort.

As she dexterously threw out her hint the Captain looked thoughtfully in the widow's face, no doubt, for purposes of comparison.

Miss Molloy's nose was long, thin, hungry, and tipped with a tinge of frosty red. Mrs. Sanson's, on the contrary, was small, provoking, slightly inclined to turn up—an imperfect nose, perhaps, regarded from an art point of view, but strictly in keeping with the rest of her features, with the arch expression in her eyes, the short upper lip, the rounded chin, and the dimples in her cheeks she could not smile without showing.

Mrs. Sanson's blushes were not so swift and ready as those of her sisters, who rejoiced in lily and rose complexions. She was a brunette—a sparkling little lady with dark hair and a skin her detractors called sallow; but, as the Captain gazed, a colour did rise into her face, which reminded Miss Molloy's papa of red carnations or a damask rose.

“I hadn't thought of it before,” he said, answering her question concerning Miss Molloy, “but I dare say you are right. Still, her mother had that sort of nose—and I—married—her.”

"Did you?—but of course you did," said the widow. "How silly I am."

"She didn't live long," pursued the Captain, meditatively.

"Did she not?" asked the lady, who knew almost to an hour when Mrs. Molloy departed to the other world.

"No—she didn't live long; if she had I might *have found out what that nose meant.*"

"I think it betokens great firmness of character," ventured the widow, who was not herself strong in that respect.

"Likely enough. I know when Molly takes a notion into her head there is no such thing as turning her."

"And gentlemen like their own way so much that they are afraid of marrying a wife who is hard to turn."

"But the trouble is we can't alter her nose," said the Captain, reverting to his daughter. "It's what God made it."

"And He knew best," agreed the widow piously.

The whole of the next day Captain Molloy looked so often and so curiously at Miss Molloy that she asked him first, "whether there was any dirt on her face?" second, "if the wind had caught her?" and third, "what he found to stare at?" The last question was put with

such asperity the Captain could only shake his head in answer.

Later on, however, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, he confided to himself that he thought it *was* her nose. "I am afraid it must be!" he said, mournfully.

CHAPTER II.

AT Kingscastle brevet rank was very freely bestowed, and as a natural consequence titles were a good deal mixed. For example, Major Sanson had never risen higher in His Majesty's service than a lieutenant, while no human being except himself knew what Nicolas Molloy had been Captain of—if, indeed, he was a Captain at all.

At the age of fourteen he ran away from home, because his father, who kept a large woollen draper's shop in the High Street, wanted him to stand behind the counter, and he never returned till he was seven-and-twenty—a man grown, and carrying a little child in his arms. He had taken to the sea, and done well. He had married, and his wife was dead. As with one voice, Kingscastle proclaimed him Captain—and Captain he ever after remained.

Miss Molloy was over twenty when he finally

settled down in Kingscastle. His father, lately dead, left him everything he possessed, charged only with an annuity to the widow. The goodwill of the shop had long been disposed of, and the old man resided till his death in one of two houses which he owned, situated in East Street.

Down that street the coaches rattled on their way to the Mullington Arms, a great hotel, near the court-house, where they changed horses. It was a very dirty, narrow, dingy, mean street, but a main thoroughfare, and a rare place for business. As a residence it suited the elder Molloy, who was accustomed to the confinement of a shop, but his son never took kindly to his new home. It had not enough sea-board for him. Opposite them were other houses, and behind only a small paved enclosure, bounded by the wall of the churchyard—which was of stone, and labour being cheap in the neighbourhood, and the visits of body-snatchers not unknown—extremely high.

On account possibly of this lack of elbow-room, the Captain spent much of his time on the quay and lounging about the parade. When indoors, likewise perhaps owing to a feeling of "being smothered," he usually cast aside his coat and sat in his shirt-sleeves; for the rest he

drank a good deal of whisky, and smoked incessantly; his face was tanned almost to the colour of Spanish mahogany, while his nose, viewed from a distance, looked like the sun seen through a fog. He made no pretence to being a gentleman, but he was a good, honest, honourable man, who would have wronged no one, who did not forget the poor, who paid whatever he had to pay punctually, and without giving his creditors the trouble of asking for their accounts. He was an affectionate son, and grieved deeply when the time came to follow his mother to the other side of the churchyard wall, and leave her there; and he would have been a tender father, if he could have found out how to set about being so, to Miss Molloy, between whom and himself there existed a sort of armed neutrality. She went her way, and he went his, and, except when those ways crossed unexpectedly, no collision ever occurred between them.

Nevertheless, with all his heart, the Captain wished some good man and true would marry his daughter. Since he became acquainted with Mrs. Sanson he had often felt life might hold other admirable things for him besides whisky and tobacco—a pleasant home, for instance, and a cheery fireside—and a bright little wife to scold if he did not keep himself

smart enough, and to make a fuss over him if he had a sore throat.

He felt his home very dull and very lonely. Though Miss Molloy was not much in it, she contrived to make her presence felt, and not agreeably. She was for everlasting scolding the servants and turning the house out of window. She had a passion for keeping other people at work, which made everybody about her miserable. She was considered a most notable manager, and whenever her father settled himself down comfortably in any one room, immediately discovered that was the apartment which most imperatively required sweeping. Further, she had set her face "hard-a-weather," as the Captain said against the widow. As yet there was no word of a marriage, but Miss Molloy, scenting danger afar off, on her own behalf made all snug for the storm she believed impended.

That the same house could not cover Miss Molloy and a stepmother Captain Molloy knew well; indeed, he by no means desired that it should do so. In whatever capacity the former remained, he understood home would never seem homely. He had his own views concerning the future, and they went a good deal further than any one imagined. In order to carry them out peaceably he

wished his daughter safely lodged under some other roof—a husband's preferably—but as that seemed impossible he more than once hinted to the fair Maria that a certain aunt of his own, residing near Rostrevor, would be glad of her company.

“She must have saved a good deal, too,” he went on diplomatically, “and I don't see why you should not come in for a share as well as another.”

But to these suggestions, and others of the same description, Miss Molloy turned a deaf ear. Unlike many young ladies of modern times she was not dissatisfied with her home. She did not desire to go to fresh places and see strange people. Kingscastle was good enough for her. The doings of her townsfolk provided sufficient excitement. She was not going to Rostrevor or anywhere else.

“They want to get rid of me,” she said to Mrs. Conrath, who lived next door, “*but I'm not gone yet.*”

“I wish you were,” muttered Mr. Conrath, who overheard this remark.

If Miss Molloy proved a trouble to her father she was ten times a greater plague to Mr. Conrath. If he had been so placed that he could have removed from “alongside of her,” as the poor man expressed himself, he would

have done so, but he held his premises from Captain Molloy on a long lease, and those premises were an inn, where a large trade was carried on; indeed, many persons considered the more important hotels might envy the business Conrath carried on at a comparatively small expense. His, though a comfortable and respectable, was not a grand house. He did not depend on chance visitors. He had his regular customers who came to him whenever business or pleasure called them to Kingscastle. On market and fair days his place was full to overflowing, and many well-to-do gentlemen used the house—having breakfast, luncheon, or dinner, as the case might be, and stopping the night, when the lateness of the hour, or the state of the weather, precluded their return home.

The work of the inn was carried on indoors by Conrath and his wife, four strapping wenches, an old waiter called Daniel, and a couple of lads; in the yard there were, of course, ostlers and helpers, for almost every man who put up at the "Raven and Tree," came either in his own gig, or riding his own stout roadster.

In addition to this staff, "The Raven" boasted another attendant, who, in curiosity and ubiquity, in slyness and cunning, might have emulated any bird of his race.

Miss Molloy!—she was as well-known to every customer as Daniel himself. To many Mrs. Conrath was an abstract individual, the fact of whose existence was only revealed by the excellence of the dinners provided under her superintendence; but the Captain's daughter had for years and years been a visible presence, flitting in and out of the hotel, not above carrying dishes to guests; smilingly ready to take orders; useful to measure a glass of whisky; not resentful of familiar salutations; willing to consider when barristers chucked her under the chin, it was only the "funny way" of those pleasant gentlemen; always about when people wanted her, and indeed for that matter when they did not; equally at home helping Betty, the head-chambermaid, to shake a feather bed, or Mrs. Conrath to make pancakes. With its head cocked a good deal on one side, the raven always seemed to greet Miss Molloy as she passed under the creaking sign, with a look of fellowship, which said, almost as plainly as words could have done—

"Without you and me Conrath would be nowhere." And yet Mr. Conrath was ungrateful; he could have dispensed with Miss Molloy's society, and never lamented the absence of that active female. If any one had been found to marry her he would have provided the wedding-

feast free, while all the old shoes in Kingscastle would scarcely have seemed to Dan enough to fling after her.

Except Mrs. Conrath, nobody about the house could bear Miss Molloy, but poor Mrs. Conrath, tied to the kitchen, regarded her as a delightful companion, who while whisking eggs, and stoning raisins, and chopping suet, treated her to the latest Kingscastle gossip—the malpractices of Miss Connor's maid, and the dreadful “goings-on” of Mrs. Neill's husband—how, it was said, Mrs. Bryan had taken to drink, and popularly supposed Mr. Gorman, instead of being in Scotland, as his wife gave out, was locked up for debt!

CHAPTER III.

“**W**HO are they at all, Dan?” It was Miss Molloy who asked the question. Miss Molloy, in morning-gown, and curl papers, who, seeing two strangers enter The Raven, had “just run in” to satisfy her curiosity.

“I don't know, Miss,” answered Dan, sulkily, “but I *did* hear the master let fall a word that they were two gentlemen from the Castle sent down to cut a bit off some tongues here that are too long, and have been ‘wagging too fast.’”

"You are joking, Dan."

"Well, well, Miss. Your way of it be it," returned the man, walking towards the kitchen where Miss Molloy followed him.

"Breakfast in the White Room," repeated the lady as she listened to his order; "bless and save us, what made you send them up there?"

"They said they wanted to be quiet, Miss, and the master bid me take them where they *wouldn't be intruded on.*"

"Oh! for any sake, Dan, let me just take up the toast; I'd give the world to get a near view of the one with the dark hair and the beautiful whiskers. He might be a duke by the look of him. I wouldn't wonder if he is some sort of nobleman."

"May be so," agreed Dan, "but as for you taking up the toast or anything else, Miss Molloy, the master told me no further gone than yesterday, that I was to do my work myself, and let nobody else take it out of my hands—*let that other be who she would.* He's greatly put about because he has been told things are known in the town that never ought to have got wind."

"Preserve us! Dan, what sort of things?" asked the fair Maria.

"Maybe Mrs. Neill could inform you better

nor me, Miss," answered Dan with a grin as he disappeared, carrying a tray.

The eighteenth century had in Ireland left a decent legacy of trouble behind for its successor. Plots and counter plots, disaffection, treason, strategy, were each and all agitating society. The mass of the people were discontented, as, indeed, a great many of them have been ever since; the Government was anxious, and not without good reason; the heads of generous, if mistaken, enthusiasts were adorning Carlisle Bridge in Dublin—the terrible story of '98 was quite a recent event—the murder of Lord Kilwarden, fresh in the minds of men—the trials of the two Emmetts and Lord Edward Fitzgerald tragedies as of yesterday. No further back than 1760 the French had effected a landing at Kingscastle, and taken and occupied that fortress, and the terror of invasion was not yet subsided. In lockers within their counters, every shopkeeper in Kingscastle kept a blunderbuss ready for service, and there was scarce a house but reckoned amongst its defensive weapons a couple of pikes. Those were stirring times, though then, "as in the days of Noe," people "ate and drank, and married and were given in marriage," and the business of daily life was conducted as though rebellion was

not lurking beneath the surface waiting but an opportunity to spring forth and lay waste the land.

In such a state of society it clearly behoved inn-keepers to be trebly on their guard, against infringing the law in the first place—against betraying their customers in the second; and in the third, making anyone free of their premises likely to cause mischief and arouse thoughts of evil, when no evil had been intended.

So far as Mr. Conrath knew, his house was perfectly free from all hint or taint of disaffection, while, on the other hand, no one supposed him so attached to the English Government that, if he suspected a rebel were occupying his best bedroom, he would send to the authorities and deliver him over to their mercies. His aim in existence was to steer a fair course—to make money and offend nobody. He did not trouble his head about who came or went. If he had been sworn on fifty bibles he would not and could not have told the colour of the horse ridden into his yard on a certain day by any special man. Everyone in his employment also having been engaged with this view, understood it was not well “to take too much notice,” and therefore when it came to Mr. Conrath’s ears that things which had to

his knowledge secretly happened in his house were talked of beyond it, things of no importance perhaps, but straws that showed how the wind blew, he grew very uneasy, and tracing matters back to their source, arrived at the conclusion, Miss Molloy "knew her way too well about The Raven."

Undoubtedly people were then just emerging from terrible anxiety—blood money, the most awful terror which can become common in a country, was still flowing freely, and when blood money flows, no man's character or life can be considered safe. Not for one moment did Mr. Conrath suspect his landlord's daughter to be in league with any informer, high or low; but he did think Miss Molloy "was too fond of putting her nose where nobody wanted to see it," and he further believed his wife was far "too soft" to be a match for the astute Maria.

For all these reasons, and as he would himself have said, "for plenty more to the back of them," he had thought fit to give Dan a hint that another waiter was not wanted at The Raven, and that even if there were, he would rather pay wages than employ Miss Molloy.

"Are they going to have their dinner here?" asked the lady of Mrs. Conrath, referring to the gentleman possessed of beautiful whiskers, and his companion.

"I don't know, I'm sure; Pat did say" (Pat was Mr. Conrath); "it depended on how long they were up on the Liberties." Now the Liberties of Kingscastle meant, a great stretch of moorland lying back among the hills, and it was well understood if there was any haunt of disaffection round or about the "loyal borough" it was a certain hamlet called Knock Vadagh, that lay on the remotest verge of that wild waste of bog where nothing grew or flourished save turf and a certain hardy race of pony.

"After a while, then, I'll come back to see if I can help you, Mrs. Conrath," said Miss Molloy; and having thus gracefully turned her defeat into a victory, Miss Molloy took her morning wrapper and curl papers out of The Raven.

She was in such a desperate hurry to get home she almost tripped over her short dress in going up the two steps leading to the Captain's door. She had an unaccustomed look in her face and a funny little smile on her lips, and she was so occupied with her own thoughts, that when the Captain, hearing her pass the parlour, where he was seated, shouted out in a stentorian voice, there was no affecting not to hear—"Molly, Molly, I say"—she paused with quite a bad grace to ascertain what he wanted.

"Mr. Tuce has been in with me, Molly, this

morning," began the Captain, "and he says my aunt's just breaking her heart to see you."

"Then her heart will have to break," was Miss Molloy's decisive answer.

"But, girl, do think a bit. She has a fine farm, and a well-furnished house, and money in the bank, and not a soul to leave all to but her husband's nephew, John Carling. It seems a serious pity to let land and stock slip away for want of a little civility."

The Captain was very much in earnest. Miss Molloy very impatient. In reply to his by no means unreasonable suggestion, she returned but one word of comment, and that word was not so genteel as the widow Sanson.

"Bother!" exclaimed Miss Molloy, a local phrase which meant a great deal more than in modern print it may seem to imply, "Bother!" and she flounced out of the room and ran upstairs.

She ran to the very top of the house. When the original builder or architect or whatever it may seem best to call him, completed the pair of houses Captain Molloy now owned, it was found that while he had finished the staircase to the lesser edifice, in the larger he had ended with the second floor. Such little mistakes in any country have never been uncommon, but what perhaps might be considered extraordinary

anywhere except in Ireland, is this; that while the attic of the Captain's house extended over the whole of the second floor of The Raven, more than one-half of the garret had never been boarded. A door was loosely broken through the party-wall to give ingress to the wide expanse of untenanted country lying unappropriated, but beyond this no steps were taken to annex the territory; there it lay with a few loose planks thrown across the joists—a possible room at some future day, but at the present apparently useless. Miss Molloy, however, knew it had its use. With light agile step she proceeded from joist to joist, till at length she found herself over the White Room. Then she lay down and listened, then she raised herself and moved in order to hear all the better.

Meantime poor Captain Molloy was considering whether he should ever find himself in a position to speak to Mrs. Sanson. She was a woman most peculiarly placed. She was, indeed, so placed, as she told “dear Captain Molloy,” she felt “at a loss to know what to do.”

When that sinner, Sanson, first saw her she was tripping along the Walls of Derry. He was lounging on that well-known prome-

nade as she came along, and thought he had never seen so pretty a girl.

Certainly she was very pretty, and she seemed to his eye the prettier in a land where brunettes are the exception and blondes the rule.

Sanson came of a good family, and the day he entered Londonderry nothing was farther from his thoughts than a *mésalliance* with the daughter of a shopkeeper; finding, however, nothing else would do, and having fallen most genuinely in love with her piquant face, he married Kate Nesley.

It is no part of this story to tell all Kate Nesley found she had married. Her husband's relations refused to believe she was married at all. Her own discarded her. Lieutenant Sanson owned some thirty acres of land—"marching" as the local phrase went—on the ancestral property near Kingscastle, and upon those and his half-pay he eventually settled down—if, indeed, such an expression could be employed concerning him.

The fact was, he left his wife to manage the land as best she could, while he spent the money derived from its culture. She had a terrible experience; her husband came home tipsy night after night; his friends, as has been said, refused to recognize her; people in a lower

rank were doubtful of her real position—she was timid, childless, lonely ; and yet, for fifteen long years, she kept up her spirits, in a cottage remote from all stir and sound of life—never made the marriage yoke irksome to a man who ought to have considered her more, and when the fiat went forth, nursed him with a devotion which won the approval of doctor and parson, who, even in Ireland, where women are devoted nurses, had rarely seen such love and constancy as hers.

When the dying man sent for Captain Molloy, that gentlemen could not imagine why he was wanted, but the “Major” soon put him *au fait* with the state of affairs as they stood.

“Larry” (his cousin) “will try to dispute my will,” he said, “so I have left you my executor, for I know you’ll stand by the little woman.”

Captain Molloy did stand by the little woman with time, money, influence. Though he had known Lieutenant Sanson in the town, it so happened he had never even seen Mrs. Sanson till the day he was sent for by the dying man. Her nice ways, and her soft voice, and the manner in which she hung about the sick bed, touched the Captain inexpressibly; and when in the natural course of the war which ensued regarding the land,

he had to see a great deal of the widow, he grew so fond of her, he began to think life would seem but a dull affair if the day ever came when the cottage door would no longer fly open at his approach, and its mistress cease to smile a welcome.

He would have asked her to marry him, though "he was only a battered old hulk," and "nothing to look at," and it "appeared like throwing herself away,"—in his tenderness and modest estimate of the rough body that contained a grand soul, Captain Molloy used many expressions of this sort concerning himself—if he had "seen his way" about Miss Molloy.

"Money shouldn't stand in the road," thought the Captain, but he could not well offer his own child money to leave his house, and he felt that it would be equally impossible for him to expect the widow to enter it while Molly remained there as a permanent fixture.

With all his heart and soul he wished she would go to Rostrevor; but with all her heart and soul Miss Molloy was determined to remain at Kingscastle. She knew everybody's business in the town—she had known it from childhood, and she felt she would be "lost" in a strange place, shut up in a "lonely country part with a bed-ridden old woman."

As she ran upstairs on the morning when Dan was so "impudent," determining to be even with the waiter and Mr. Conrath too, she once again decided her father should not get rid of her as easily as he wanted.

"The widow will have to content herself without him a bit longer," she thought, in terse if inelegant language; and then she fell to wondering who the stranger with the "lovely dark hair" might be.

Meantime, the gentlemen who were going to the Liberties, merely with a view of seeing what encroachments sundry landowners in the neighbourhood were making upon what was really common ground, had sat down to breakfast, and were bringing good appetites to bear on the good things provided for them by Mrs. Conrath.

Conrath himself, after giving the forcible directions concerning their comfort, previously mentioned, had started to attend a neighbouring fair, and the strangers were waited on by Dan, who, going down into the kitchen for some more fried ham and eggs, reported them as "remarkably pleasant," and "content with what was set before them."

"I am afraid we shall have to go into Court," said he who had struck the virgin fancy of the Captain's daughter.

"We will try all other means first," answered

the other; "if once we draw the sword, we must make up our minds to throw away the scabbard, and for my own part—"

It was destined that the end of this sentence should be lost for ever. Even while he was speaking, and while Dan, dish in hand, was in the act of opening the door, there came a noise as if the house was falling; the room was filled with a blinding shower of dust—the whole ceiling, as it seemed, crashed in, and some heavy body plumped down on the middle of the breakfast table.

"God be good to us!" exclaimed Dan, backing to the extremest verge of the landing—in his terror he had dropped the dish of ham, and, could anyone have seen anything, the sight of the grease soaking into the carpet might have wrung the heart of a careful housekeeper.

As for the strangers, they had started from their chairs, and, now choked and blinded, stood incapable of speech or sight.

Miss Molloy, who had caused all the disturbance—Miss Molloy, who, moving incautiously, had slipped through the joists and descended in the midst of an indescribable confusion, bringing a great part of the ceiling with her—was the only one who kept her wits. Nimble getting off the table she whisked out of the door and was in the hall before any one saw her.

Before or since, probably, no woman ever went down a couple of flights of stairs so fast, and she would have got clean out of the house without exciting comment, but for the fact that Mick, one of the boys attached to the establishment, was standing on the door-step as she tried to slip quietly by.

He thought nothing of seeing her of course, her presence was so usual an event at The Raven as not to be deserving of comment; but as she was gliding past him his eye chanced to fall on her dress.

"Wait a bit, Miss," he said, catching hold of her skirt as he spoke; "do ye know ye've *half-a-pound of butter sticking to the tail of your gown.*"

* * * *

A little later Captain Molloy was, in the act of cleaning his telescope, surprised by the entrance of his daughter, arrayed in the afternoon costume, which was the admiration of her acquaintances, work-box in hand, and a sheet over her arm.

"Why, Molly!" he exclaimed—for it was not Miss Molloy's habit to make an elaborate toilet at so early a period of the day, or to sit down to needlework till she had well harried the servants and caused a good deal of confusion and annoyance about the house. "Are you going to keep me company?"

"Yes, if you like;" and there was a something in her tone which made the Captain look at her narrowly.

"Aren't you well, Molly?" he asked.

"I have a bad head," she answered; but the pain she thus indicated was nothing to that she felt in her spirit.

"I'll be the laughing-stock of the town," she considered. "I'll never be able to show my face down the street again."

She began sewing, and the Captain went on putting his telescope to rights.

After awhile Miss Molloy spoke—

"What was that you were saying a while ago about Mrs. Carling?"

"Only that she is so keen to have somebody belonging to her in the house. She is lonely having no one but servants, and she has taken a fancy she would like for you to go to her, and stay awhile. However, if you are set against the notion, I'll say no more about it, but I have been thinking I may as well go over and see the old lady myself."

"I don't mind if I go with you," said Miss Molloy. The Captain was so amazed he almost let the telescope slip out of his fingers.

"What's the reason of this change?" he asked.

"I am getting tired of Kingscastle. I think I'd like to go away for a bit."

"When?" asked the Captain.

"The sooner the better," she answered; "to-day if it was possible."

"Molly," observed her father solemnly, "I'm afraid you're ill."

"I'll be well enough when I get away altogether from this place. If you say you'll take me to Rostrevor to-morrow I'll go and pack up my things now."

Need it be stated that the Captain remarked he would take her with pleasure, and the same evening he went out to the cottage and proposed to the widow, who put her hand in his, and said all she should regret in marrying him was leaving the place she had been so fond of.

"You need not leave it," he answered, "I can come here."

"I wonder why Maria wants to go in such a hurry," marvelled the widow after a time.

"So do I, but I am afraid to ask her reason, for fear she should change her mind."

Before he slept, however, the Captain knew. Mr. Conrath asked him to step into The Raven, and over a tumbler of punch told his landlord what had happened.

Somehow the matter was hushed up. Cap-

tain Molloy paid what was required to repair all damages and tie all tongues. Mr. Conrath himself drove Miss Molloy and her father as far as Williams-pass, on their way to Rostrevor, and eventually it was agreed he should take the Captain's house, and extend the business of The Raven.

For the rest Miss Molloy's Mishap was one which taught her a good lesson, and when eventually she married Mrs. Carling's nephew, and settled down at Rostrevor, her father returning from the wedding reported a wonderful change had taken place in his daughter.

"She is just as quiet now as she used to be the reverse," he said. "That one false step was the making of her. Even her nose has another look with it!"



MRS. DONALD.

IF you had been taken into it blindfold, and then with the bandage removed from your eyes, asked to guess where you were, you never could have answered—

“In a small drawing-room in the very heart of fashionable London.”

You would have found it exceedingly difficult indeed instantly to say where you were, since easy chairs, gipsy tables, water-colour drawings, statuettes of price, boudoir grand pianofortes, and pile carpets, are not generally grouped together under the greenwood tree.

Without the slightest knowledge of your whereabouts, you might have hazarded a conjecture that you were in the magnificently appointed summer-house attached to some great mansion, which had been decked out, to try to please the daughter, or ward, or bride of an enormously wealthy nobleman. Certainly it would not have occurred to any one that it was one of the living-rooms in a house owned by a

widow lady whose income, all told, amounted to less than fifteen hundred a year.

And yet such was the fact.

Having abated some of the surprise which strangers always felt at so unexpected an announcement, if you had further been told that as you beheld the apartment then, you might, if you were a privileged visitor, behold it always, your astonishment would have been increased a hundredfold. Like Mrs. Donald's many friends, you felt that though the room looked very pretty—lovely, indeed—it was scarcely adapted for, shall we say, the purposes of residence. Nevertheless, the “delightful widow,” as her admirers, who were legion, called her, had resided in it thus decorated for three years. She was prolific in names for her *maison de ville*, wrote of it and spoke of it as her “doll's house,” her “warm cozy little nest,” her “bower,” her “fairy nook,” her “arbour,” “set out with flowers and wreathed with greenery.”

“Come and see me,” she would say to any stranger she desired to propitiate. “Don't, pray don't think of making a mere formal call. Come up some evening ; my house is too small, and besides, I have not the means to give dinner parties, but you shall taste my coffee—it is a dream ! and you must hear my dear

Nina sing! And you can sit amongst flowers, and forget you are in stony-hearted London! My friends—those I love, I mean, call my little oasis of coolness, perfume, colour, their ‘rest in the wilderness.’ You must come, I cannot allow you to refuse.”

And so you, supposing you who read to be the stranger in question, would go and meet fair women and pleasant men, and listen to wonderful music, and partake of many good things besides coffee, and be cordially welcomed and lingeringly permitted to depart, and walking home through the cold night air to your chambers or your hotel, you would find yourself uttering the refrain every one who knew Mrs. Donald repeated—

“What a fascinating woman, what a delightful creature!”

Whether on calm consideration you would have cared for your wife or your sister to be as fascinating or as charming in the same way is quite another matter. On the whole, people are, perhaps, too fond of old fashions in the domestic virtues, and it is not to be expected that Englishmen should in cold blood desire their womenkind to emulate the doings of a lady who turned her drawing-room into a bower and herself posed for an angel.

If you took Mrs. Donald at all, you had to

take her as she was—an exception to most known rules. In like manner, if you accepted her hospitality, which though peculiar, was large, you could not well find fault with her style of decoration as being unsuited for family use. All you had to do, and all indeed you did do, if you continued to go to her house, was to admire it and her.

Amongst her acquaintances there was only one person who ever even ventured to look an objection to anything she might say or do; and he—I quote the lady—was “the dearest, and oldest, and truest, and, alas! crossdest of dear true old friends.”

As all great achievements are undoubtedly the result more of accident than design, so Mrs. Donald's drawing-room which had conferred upon her celebrity could probably claim as little original depth of conception as Hood's “Song of the Shirt,” or Jerrold's “Candle Lectures.”

As a freak, when she was bored to death in a lonely part of the country, she had gathered masses of wild flowers and amused herself decking out the little parlour of an old-fashioned farmhouse in Cumberland, where at that moment her “solitary lot was cast.”

The effect pleased her. She saw in a moment how the buds and leaves beautified and re-

fined the common furniture—the unlovely room. An hour before, she had longed in an access of despair to break the jug crammed full of hawthorn, and lilac, and laburnum, and fling the flowers to wither. But now she understood that artistically arranged, or rather naturally arranged, all blossoms delight the eye. She filled the fire-place with oak branches, and strewed the hearth with ferns and fir cones. Into her service she pressed dock leaves, and festooned the mantel-shelf with garlands of wild convolvulus. Day by day she pursued her labours, altering her plan of operation, and consequently the results produced, making a terrible litter, and exercising the neat and orderly soul of the mistress of the house, and red-armed servant, but producing wonderful artistic results.

“I have made a bower of my ugly little sitting-room,” she wrote to a friend. “My present home is *hideous*, though surrounded by everything that is lovely, grand, ennobling, inspiring. When I arise in the morning, I throw open my window, and look down upon a landscape a poet would try in vain to depict in words. The lake smiling in the early sunshine, laughing in the light of morning like a happy, innocent child just awakened from slumber, islands dotting its surface, hills rising

on the opposite shore, and mountains rearing their grand heads in the further distance still.

“At the edge of the lake below my window is a plantation, the trees in which bend over the water till their branches touch and kiss the sun-illumined ripples; just beneath where I stand drinking in, with world-parched lips, this great draught of loveliness, a green field slopes gently down to the plantation; it is newly mown, and they have turned into it fifty or more sheep and lambs, white as the driven snow, fresh from the hands of the shearer. It is too beautiful, too peaceful, too perfect: If there was one congenial soul to share the ecstasy of mine, the bliss I feel would be too great; it would be more than my poor humanity could support!

“Well, dear, and from this I descend to a parlour—(such a parlour!) or rather I descended—for I have now transformed the room into a vision of beauty. I have rifled the hedgerows, and scratched my poor fingers with the cruel thorns on the rose bushes. (Alas! there is no one here to remove those thorns.) No transformation scene was ever more complete; no enchanter’s wand ever produced a more magical effect. I stood and looked at my own handiwork amazed. Would you could look upon it with me. Oh! for a friend, a dear sympathetic

friend to praise my labours, to sit in my rose-wreathed bower, and help me to while away some of those lonely hours, which pass through these beautiful scenes with leaden feet as though loth to part company with such heavenly loveliness."

No one, after reading this extract from an "overburdened heart," will be surprised to hear Mrs. Donald was a "child of nature."

That she had a horror of being alone with her mother proves nothing to the contrary.

She was always raving about moonlights and sunsets, dawns, and the "dear mystic hour" 'twixt day and night. The autumnal tints induced ecstasies of gushing rapture, while over daisies and buttercups, violets and cowslips, the lady positively drivelled.

A primrose in her eyes was much more than a primrose. She felt it an inspiration. "The sweet, modest, pathetic darlings, she would say, looking at a clump of them. "Do you know, I think sometimes they are trying to speak to me; but I am so full of fancies!"

There were, I regret to say, persons so prosaic and wretchedly commonplace, that they speculated coarsely concerning the age of this child of nature. Actually they wondered how old she was. "Women and music," as we all know, "should never be dated," and far

be it from me to indicate too closely the number of springs and summers Mrs. Donald had greeted in her delightfully childish fashion.

She had been married "when a baby." Each fresh admirer and a great many other people were regularly informed of this fact; her moods and fancies had in five years from the auspicious day proved too much for poor Mr. Donald, to whom she "was sold like a lamb," and who "behaved to her like a brute," and then she had been a widow for ten years. Make of it what you please. The difficulty lies merely in the beginning.

Her worst enemy—if she had one—could not deny that whatever her age, Mrs. Donald was still a very pretty woman. Nothing had happened to hinder her preserving such beauty as God had given. She lived well, dressed well, was required to endure no greater trouble than the insolence of a maid or the trial of a bad cook. No wonder the years as they passed touched that fair cheek lightly.

She was not tall—"such a little creature," she said—but she was fat—not vulgarly or uncomfortably fat, still, her bones were clothed.

She had not, however, the faintest comprehension of the fact. Having posed for a sylph in the days when she was "a baby," it was natural that she should ever after allude to

convince against her better judgment, but Mrs. Donald was so sure, the young lady argued.

"Who am I, to set up my narrow prejudices against her opinions and those of all her friends?"

Before the week was out, however, Mrs. Donald had altered her tactics.

Some "wretched publisher" recommended her to study Lindley Murray and Mavor's spelling-book before commencing to write again, which ungentlemanly remark so crushed her "poor sensitive heart," that Mrs. Donald took incontinently to poetry.

"There, at least," she said "the outpourings of one's soul need not be put into shackles:" and, accordingly, she began to pour out her soul by the yard—indeed, by the mile.

When a lady is possessed of a good income, when she is still pretty and attractive, keeps a liberal table, and likes to see her friends around her, as a rule she is not likely to hear much harsh criticism on any matter she undertakes.

It is far easier to praise than to blame, to flatter than to explain why one has doubts about the merits of the "most splendid lines ever written."

Amongst her acquaintances, she found no

one bold enough to say "You are making yourself ridiculous." On the contrary, she was able to secure an apparently delighted audience whenever she chose to read aloud her latest idyll.

She read remarkably well, it may be here stated; so well, that she really could make the greatest nonsense sound for a moment like sense. There were only two persons she could not rouse into enthusiasm; one, the dearest of cross old friends who had "always been in love with her," and whose lack of appreciation she attributed to "imperfect education," and possibly some latent jealousy; the other her darling Nina, about whose perfect devotion she had latterly entertained some doubts.

"If it were not *too* absurd, I should say she was setting her cap at Mr. Scarsdale. Poor simpleton! She little knows how vain are all her ridiculous efforts when I am near."

Nina was the most "devoted of companions," who had always hitherto regarded Mrs. Donald as but a little lower than an angel, but who recently could not help thinking it was a pity her patroness mixed amongst so frivolous a set of people.

"Her dearest of old friends and her most charming of companions had," so confided

Mrs. Donald to visitors, "one fault in common, they were both destitute of imagination."

Acquaintances looked grave when Mrs. Donald so spoke; but they laughed afterwards, for it had not escaped observation that Mr. Scarsdale, the "dearest of old friends," was *épris* with Nina, the "most charming of companions."

Nina's dark, clever face, and strong sense and solid accomplishments, had evidently done their work. "The fair widow would be wise to look to her laurels," said another widow who was not fair.

At last however, Mrs. Donald's opportunity arrived.

"You must come to me to-morrow night," she wrote to Mr. Scarsdale. "You know I have been always told the *only* thing I required was an introduction. I have got that now. I have made the acquaintance in a most marvellous way, of which more hereafter, of a Mr. Tiernay. He is on the Press. He knows everybody and everything—from the real power on the 'Times,' to the editor of the 'Servants' Hall Gazette.' He could not refrain from tears when I read him my last poem. 'That's it,' he cried rapturously; 'that's the true thing. Talk about Tennyson—once you get into print, people will not

think anything more about Tennyson. Why, you ought to have thirty guineas for that little poem.' Thirty guineas! Just fancy and I wrote it in less than half-an-hour—copied it and all. Why, if I only dashed off one a day, that would be one hundred and eighty pounds a week, not counting Sundays, when I *never* do anything but go to church in the morning, and receive my friends in the evening, and £180 a-week would be—let me see—but never mind: you will be able to calculate that better than I. Remember, you *must* come to-morrow evening. Mr. Tiernay is to be with us, and a few friends to whom I am going to read 'And still the world goes by,' which Mr. Tiernay says is *far finer* than the 'Charge of the Six Hundred.'"

To Pitt Street accordingly, next evening, Mr. Scarsdale repaired. The drawing-room was pretty as ever. There was music going on, there were several women, and a fair sprinkling of men; Mrs. Donald was radiant, her dress and herself looked beautiful. She moved amongst her flowers—"the fairest flower of all." She was benignant to Nina, almost tender to Mr. Scarsdale, delightful to everyone. The coffee that was "as a dream" was handed round; but Mrs. Donald signified the lion of the evening need not be expected till

later, "not, I am afraid, till we are going to supper, because he has to go to some dreadful concert he is obliged to review, before he can spare a minute for poor little me."

So far as appearances went, it seemed as though Mrs. Donald's guests could have amused themselves well enough if Mr. Tiernay had stayed away altogether; but, at length, just as they were going down to supper, he really did arrive, and proved to be an Irishman with an awful brogue, unlimited assurance, a thirst which was simply unquenchable, and a melting way of telling falsehoods which might have deceived an archangel.

Really nothing better than a penny-a-liner, before he had been five minutes at table, he convinced everyone present he was "hand-and-glove" with Delane, that Cook at the "Saturday" always said "Tiernay, my boy, what do you think of this?" that when he could spare time he read for "Murray," and that he was never absent from the "Punch" weekly dinner.

It was Mr. Scarsdale's first introduction to literary society; but even he felt inclined to believe Mr. Tiernay might be a potentate among the people he talked of so familiarly. Authoresses he habitually mentioned by their Christian names, and authors by some fanciful abbreviation adopted by their most intimate

friends. Certainly he proved amusing; unrestrained by the slightest reverence for facts, he told the most 'marvellous stories, eating and drinking at the same time as Mr. Scarsdale had never seen man eat and drink before.

"But Lord!" he said at last, turning round upon the company, "what, when ye've said all ye like about popular writers, is any one of them to the lady who is going to treat us this evening to one of her soul-visions? Mrs. Donald, excuse my outspokenness, but arn't ye soon going to read 'And still the world goes by?'"

Mrs. Donald would like to have proposed a return to the drawing-room before introducing her "Benjamin," her "fairest of children" to the general gaze, but she was afraid of Mr. Tiernay. She had got him; if she ventured to make a move she might lose him, so Nina was dispatched for the poem. During Miss Oswald's absence Mr. Tiernay managed to secure two more glasses of wine, which, in addition to the many glasses previously swallowed, did not seem to produce the smallest appreciable effect.

When Mrs. Donald took the manuscript, however, he looked up at her for one single instant, and then covered his face with his hand.

"It's just too much for me," he confided to

his next neighbour in an audible aside. "Ye'll say the same yourself when ye hear it."

"My little poem," began Mrs. Donald, who looked beautiful and triumphant," is called 'And still the world goes by.'"

"And so it does—so it does," commented Mr. Tiernay, almost tearfully.

"Of course it is a poor weak idea," suggested Mrs. Donald.

"Listen to her! the modesty of janius," said Mr. Tiernay, in a loud whisper.

"Such as it is, however," continued Mrs. Donald, "I will read the few lines."

"Hear, hear!" encouraged Tiernay, and "hear, hear!" cried the company, following suit.

"And still the world goes by," announced Mrs. Donald.

"Now just listen, all of ye," said Mr. Tiernay.

"High in a lowly garret
(commenced Mrs. Donald)

Beside an humble bed,
A woman sat with swollen eyes,
Watching her sleeping dead."

("That's fine," muttered Mr. Tiernay, pouring himself out another glass of wine).

"Below is the city's traffic,
A roar to the mourner's ear,
Yet made up of infinite units,
To the Heart of the Maker most dear.
For through sorrow and joy and toil,
And toil and sorrow and joy,
This brave old world, this grey old world,
Goes by—goes by—goes by!"

"Splendid," cried Mr. Tiernay. Miss Oswald, the devoted, who sat beside him, might have been mistaken, but she really did think she heard him first murmur in the voice of one awakened from sleep, "Chorus, gentlemen."

There were about fifteen verses to Mrs. Donald's ditty, each one as musical in rhyme and as original in conception as that I have quoted. But Mr. Tiernay was not satisfied with one reading, he required a second, and when she again commenced—

"High in a lowly garret," he said, plaintively,—*"Ay, ay, ay! Now that's true enough; only how on earth could she know anything about it?"*

Mr. Scarsdale listened in amazement. Was he out of his senses, or was he alone sane, and all the rest of the party mad? He looked at Miss Oswald; she was sitting with her glance fastened on a plate of cherries, and he could not catch the expression that lay in the depths of her dark grey eyes.

Encouraged by so much applause, Mrs. Donald favoured the company with a few more specimens of "soul-stirrings" she had "dashed off" at a "white heat," but to Mr. Scarsdale's "unimaginative" nature they were even poorer than that "passionate murmur" with which the lady led off.

One stated how, "under the deep blue vault of heaven" she sat one summer's day, and another had a great deal in it about "burnished skies" and "glowing sunsets" not particularly intelligible to the uninitiated. Mr. Tiernay, however, praised them all, and, after having drunk an incredible quantity of wine, rose to go, steady as old Time.

Mrs. Donald tried then and there to induce him to introduce the manuscripts to the "Times" or the "Saturday Review," but he firmly declined to "jeopardise" her chances of success.

"You must take them to the magazines, and you must take them yourself," he said. "See the editors, and you'll know how to deal with them," and he dexterously backed out of the room and into the street before Mrs. Donald could again press the cause of her "heart's darlings" upon him.

As for Mr. Scarsdale, he slipped away at the same time, and proposed to walk a little distance with the great author.

"Tell me," he said, as he paced along, "do you really think Mrs. Donald's poetry so fine?"

Mr. Tiernay paused and surveyed Mr. Scarsdale under a gas-lamp.

"Poetry," he answered oracularly, "is a matter of opinion, but the quality of wine is

a matter of fact. Mrs. Donald's wine is beyond doubt."

CHAPTER II.

THERE was bitter grief in Pitt Street. The great East India House in which, in accordance with the terms of Mr. Donald's will, what the widow called her "pittance," had been left, failed one day, and issued a circular which could only be understood as meaning that the result of liquidation might prove anything, from ten shillings to twopence in the pound.

Pending whatever good or ill fortune the future held for her, the widow had nothing left, save some two hundred pounds from her last quarter, the house and furniture in Pitt Street, and her friends.

But she did not despair. Things looked black enough in all conscience, but their aspect only decided her to accept Mr. Scarsdale.

"I always intended to marry him some day," she thought, "and this only hastens the catastrophe," with which idea she waited for the gentleman, to whom she had at once sent in hot haste.

He came instantly in answer to her summons, but he did not propose. He only advised the immediate sale of the house in Pitt Street, and

her temporary removal into furnished apartments, only a few doors from her former residence.

"Then after a little while you can form your plans," he said, and left her somewhat disappointed, while he himself walked away altogether vexed and troubled at the terms in which she had spoken of the departed Donald.

Nevertheless, he stood firmly by her, saw to all the needful business details, invested the sum that the house and its contents fetched judiciously and promptly, had interviews with various lawyers, and paid such an amount of money into her bankers as would he hoped and believed, prevent the lady for some time feeling the full extent of her reverses.

Mrs. Donald had wished the whole amount realised by the sale of the house in Pitt Street to be passed into her current account, but on this point Mr. Scarsdale stood firm.

"It would be madness," he said, "to encroach on that money." He should much prefer to lend her whatever she might require for present needs.

And then the widow smiled sweetly and murmured—

"Just as you think best, dear friend."

Three months passed over, and the affairs of the great India house, so far from becoming

more intelligible, only seemed to grow more hopelessly entangled, when it happened that Mr. Scarsdale was obliged to leave town for a short time.

"I am sorry to have to go just now," he said kindly to Mrs. Donald; "but you seem getting on pretty comfortably, I think," he added, with some of the old feeling in his voice. "It is a great relief to me you have Miss Oswald to take care of you—she seems so faithful."

Mrs. Donald laughed.

"Companions generally are faithful as long as their salaries do not get into arrear."

"It pains me to hear you speak so bitterly," he remarked gently.

"I shall speak differently when I have grown quite accustomed to my poverty," she answered, and they parted.

He hoped she was learning a useful lesson, and that eventually she might regain what he believed was her real nature, now that he fondly trusted the toadies and flatterers of more prosperous days had deserted her. He was perfectly unaware that Mrs. Donald was leading the same life as formerly, giving little parties, going about to entertainments, travelling, in fact, precisely the same road as of yore, only with worse means, though the world in

general did not as yet grasp that fact. It never occurred to him she was getting into debt.

When he returned to London he found awaiting him a goodly pile of letters placed to the right of his blotting-pad, whilst on the pad itself, artistically arranged, apparently by some one possessed of a fine sense of humour, in two even rows, were fourteen epistles, each one of which bore on the left top corner the word, "**IMMEDIATE**," written so large that in very deed he who ran, or did anything else might read.

Well he knew the handwriting. For years he had been familiar with that black splashing caligraphy, but never before did it happen to him to see all the wild haste and crazy impatience of his correspondent grouped together at the same time in the shape of fourteen "**IMMEDIATES**."

"What can be the matter now?" he thought with a quiet smile, and he took up the last epistle, which seemed to make the apex stone of the cairn, opened it and read—

"Why *don't you* come to me? I have sent to your house time after time, and the invariable answer is, 'Out of town.' If you are tired of me and my misery say so; but should you retain even a spark of affection for one you formerly professed to love, do not delay a

moment after you receive this. Of all the women on earth I am the most wretched! Would you believe that that abject creature Giles, the butcher, actually refused to send me two mutton chops yesterday; the milkman won't let me have any more cream; that basest of her sex, Mrs. Mills, sent me up her duty (duty indeed!) and she should feel much obliged if I could suit myself with other apartments during the course of the next fortnight, as the season was coming on, and she did not want to disappoint a lady and gentleman who came to her 'regular.' The wretch!—the mean, unprincipled, equivocating wretch. And as for that horrid Tiernay—but no, I can't write the insult he offered me. These little hands long to strangle him. Oh! come—oh, pray, pray, pray come to your distracted Amabel."

"Parents have a great deal to answer for," thought Mr. Scarsdale, as he pocketed this effusion. "Suppose she had been called Sally now!" but imagination totally failing to supply any clue to the labyrinth of speculation in which this idea plunged him, he abandoned it and walked off to Pitt Street.

There he found Mrs. Donald in the most tempestuous of moods and the most becoming of dresses.

So far as she was concerned, she had never looked prettier since her first youth, and perhaps not even then, for she was one of those women who in their middle life appear more beautiful, adorned with the adventitious aids art can supply, than many young girls do when forced to trust to simplicity of attire and their own loveliness.

"I thought you were *never* coming," she said, running across the room to meet him, seizing both his hands and imprinting an impulsive kiss on one of them. "I was afraid you had quite forgotten poor little me."

"You need not have been afraid of that," he answered gravely, leading her to a sofa, but himself taking a seat at a safe though convenient distant. "I scarcely understood from your note what the pressing trouble might be. How can I help you?"

There was a change in his voice. Mrs. Donald, handkerchief pressed to her eyes, heard that change, and furtively peered through the lace to try and understand what it meant.

"I am most wretched," she said.

"I need not tell you I am willing to do all that lies in my power to mitigate your misery," he replied.

"You can't give me back my fortune though," she observed, struck by a sudden inspiration.

"No, I cannot do that," he answered, which was quite true, only he might have added, "Accept mine."

This he did not do, however.

Mr. Tiernay, an acute if disagreeable observer of human nature, once remarked Mrs. Donald was like an east wind, but that nobody would ever understand the fact until her sun set.

He meant until she was too old to charm with her personal graces men and women; but now sunset had come under quite different circumstances. It was still high day; and yet—and yet—and yet—

Mr. Scarsdale hated himself for the feeling. Nevertheless, he knew that even to him Mrs. Donald with the gilding off was quite a different being to Mrs. Donald with the gilding on. Beforetime she had seemed to him as a goddess: now she was but a woman, and a very inferior sort of woman too.

"And everyone is treating me so abominably," she went on, after a just perceptible pause.

"I am very sorry to hear it," he answered, and there was a ring of masculine sympathy in his tone.

"People on whom I have literally showered benefits have proved most ungrateful, and those who formerly could come and eat my whitebait

and drink my wine turn their backs upon me now."

Mr. Scarsdale was not at all surprised to hear this, but he wisely held his peace.

"There is that odious Tiernay, for instance," went on Mrs. Donald.

"What has he done?" asked Mr. Scarsdale as she paused.

"Well, you remember how he raved about my poetry; you know how he cried over that pathetic heart-song, 'And still the world goes by?'"

Yes, Mr. Scarsdale knew Mr. Tiernay had wept, and he remembered what Mr. Tiernay had said to him afterwards, but again he held silence to be the wiser part, and simply inclined his head in reply to Mrs. Donald's statement.

"In my despair I sent for the creature," the lady explained. "I devised a luncheon, which was a reverie. He ate it; he drank a whole bottle of Madeira, then I brought him up here, and explained my position. He sat just where you are. I said, 'Mr. Tiernay, I am a beggar! If I can't make money by disposing of my soul-poems I shall have to go to the workhouse. You know how beautiful they are; as you have often said, there is no one living or dead who ever wrote as I do. I am but a poor weak creature to go and face those dreadful pub-

lishers. You must take a few of my inspirations—here are fifty—long and short—upon all sorts of subjects—and dispose of them for me.’”

Mrs. Donald paused; perhaps for a reply, perhaps because she was out of breath, as she had delivered her utterances in a series of interjections. No reply came; there was a stillness which could be felt; Mr. Scarsdale did not speak a word.

“What do you think the *brute* said?” asked the lady.

The gentleman to whom she addressed this question winced. It pained him to hear the word italicized proceed from such lovely lips.

“I cannot form an idea,” he answered.

“He said, ‘*If you have friends willing to help you, get them to buy you a mangle; you may make a living by turning it; but the editor does not exist out of Hanwell who would pay you for your poetry!*’”

“And what did you do?” asked Mr. Scarsdale.

It was a cruel speech, and yet though the only friend she had, grasped the fact, he felt it to be so utterly true, he could not find a word to say except “What did you do?”

“Do!” repeated Mrs. Donald, rising, th better to emphasize her words. “I ordered him out of the house. I said, ‘Go—go at

once, before these little hands grasp your throat and choke your dastard life out of your vile body'—I said——”

“Do not tell me any more,” entreated Mr. Scarsdale, who really turned sick as he listened ; who could have covered his face for very shame ; who felt as if almost he should be forced to cry aloud, so keen was his sorrow, so sharp his disappointment. Honestly, loyally, faithfully he had loved this woman through years. He had imagined her follies were merely superficial, and that in reality her heart was gold ; and now the veil was torn from before him, and he saw her as she was, a poor, weak, vain, frivolous, selfish simpleton, who had not even sufficient refinement to keep her from bandying words like the lowest fishwife with such a man as Tiernay.

Modesty and decorum—humble robes it may be, but still so exquisitely befitting a woman's nature that, decked in them, the lowliest maiden may seem more beautiful than an empress lacking such apparel—at last, Mr. Scarsdale understood these were the qualities his mistress lacked.

Dead at his feet lay the ideal he had loved and worshipped, whilst in living presence before him stood a ridiculous virago—beautiful indeed—but destitute in his eyes of a single charm.

"I think I gathered from your note that you are in want of money," he said, after a moment's pause. "I hope you will allow me to be your banker till you have formed some plan for the future."

Some plan for the future! What plan could she form save that he should marry her? Till he came into the room she had been as sure he meant to do so as that she was in existence; and now if she had been the plainest woman on earth his words might have been more lover-like.

Well, she could but try to lure him back again. In a second her whole manner altered. She grew soft, tender, grateful, gracious. She cried genuine tears of distress; she smiled sweet smiles of thankfulness. He felt the charm of old stealing over him, but he did not intend to marry her. He would help her—be her friend; do all that lay in his power to lessen the bitterness of her position; but make her his wife, no. The strongest point in his nature, perhaps, was strong common sense, and he knew perfectly that, as a leopard cannot change its spots, so a silly woman must, to the end, be a source of misery to the husband she mates with.

"How is Miss Oswald?" he asked as he rose to go.

"She was very well the last time I saw

her," answered Mrs. Donald with a curling lip. "She has left me."

"Left you!" he repeated in amazement.

"Yes; like all the rest of the world except yourself, she could not remain true to one who had been as a sister to her. She was most impertinent and took herself off at a moment's notice."

"Well, you do astonish me," remarked Mr Scarsdale.

"I was astonished myself, I assure you," said Mrs. Donald.

"If every one else had proved false, I should have expected Miss Oswald to remain true."

"So should I," agreed Mrs. Donald; "but you see she did not."

"I am more pained and shocked than I can express," said Mr. Scarsdale.

"I could not have imagined any woman would be so abominably ungrateful," observed Mrs. Donald; "but, however, I find ingratitude is now all I need expect from anyone."

"Do not include me in the category of false friends," entreated Mr. Scarsdale.

"You, oh! you," exclaimed Mrs. Donald, flinging herself on the sofa, and burying her face in the pillows; "you are one of a million—you are alone in the world. I can never, never, never thank you enough," and she burst into violent weeping.

He drew a step nearer to her, he put out his hand timidly, and laid it on her shoulder.

"He will propose," she thought, "now or never;" and she buried her face deeper in the pillow, and sobbed more hysterically.

It was never, though. He did not propose. He only said, "Do not cry so bitterly; so long as I live you shall never want a friend;" and then he went away, feeling, perhaps, it was about the safest and easiest course to pursue.

"I beg your pardon, sir; but might I say a word to you," said the landlady, Mrs. Mills, as he was about to let himself out of the house, and step quietly into the street.

Evidently Mrs. Mills had been watching for him, and she now stood with the parlour-door open, inviting him to enter.

"If you please Mr. Scarsdale," she went on after having scarcely closed the door, "I want to speak to you about that poor young lady."

"What young lady?" asked Mr. Scarsdale.

"Miss Oswald."

"Oh!" he exclaimed; "I am terribly disappointed to hear she has gone. I never believed she would desert Mrs. Donald in her trouble."

"Desert!" repeated Mrs. Mills, indignantly; "she did not desert Mrs. Donald. She was

sent off. When the butcher refused to supply chops on credit for the dogs, and the milkman said he thought something lighter than cream would suit their stomachs better, Miss Oswald suggested that, perhaps, it might be as well to give them away. My Betsy was waiting on them at luncheon at the time, and heard all that passed. She did not say a word but what I tell you, sir, and then Mrs. Donald flared out—said she would not keep her another minute, that she had eaten the bread of idleness, that she had best go back to her beggarly home, from which she was sorry she had ever taken her. ‘Leave the room this minute,’ she said, ‘and never let me see your ungrateful face again.’”

“It is impossible Mrs. Donald could have said anything of the kind,” exclaimed Mr. Scarsdale; “there must be some mistake.”

“There is no mistake, sir, indeed. Half an hour after Miss Oswald came down to me looking like a ghost. She had her watch and chain in her hand, and she said, ‘Do you think, Mrs. Mills, anyone would lend me enough money, if I leave these things in their hands, to return to Cumberland. I suppose Betsy told you Mrs. Donald wants me to go at once,’ and then she sat down and cried as if her heart would break.”

“Well, I knew she had no money, because she was constantly buying things for Mrs. Donald, who latterly had not been even paying her salary, and I had none to spare myself, as I always try to settle my rent regular, so there was nothing for it but to pledge the watch and chain, and with what they brought, that poor dear started all alone for Cumberland. Mrs. Donald would not bid her good-bye; but Miss Oswald bore no malice. She said to me, ‘She did not mean to be so cruel. She could not. When she is more composed give her my love, and tell her I will write. It was the insolence of the butcher put her out.’

“‘And it was no insolence at all, Miss,’ I made bold to reply. ‘This man said fair enough; he had never been hard about giving credit to Christians, but he would not to dogs.’”

“She was obliged to part with her watch and chain, you say?” remarked Mr. Scarsdale, somewhat irrelevantly.

“Yes, sir; and I thought I would make free to tell you how the case stands.”

What Mr. Scarsdale thought of the case as it stood may be gathered from the fact that within twenty-four hours he was speeding down into Cumberland, where he put to Miss

Oswald the one important question Mrs. Donald was waiting to have propounded to her.

"Will you be my wife?" he said; "I am not a young man, but I will try to make you happy, and Miss Oswald answered, "Yes."

When Mrs. Donald heard what had come to pass, she wrote first a scathing note to her "devoted Nina," and then asked Mr. Scarsdale for a further loan, with which she started for Italy. Thither the news of her misfortune had not preceded her, and as she travelled with a maid, courier, and the dogs, her old friends saw no reason to doubt she was as well off as formerly.

Ere long she met with a former admirer—a count with a ruined palace, a long line of ancestors, a handsome face, and a moderate fortune he wished to make larger. He asked her to marry him and she consented. They had not been man and wife a week, however, before the truth leaked out, but the world as yet does not believe the fact that Mrs. Donald's was a most insignificant *dot*.

Mr. Scarsdale acted generously; Nina with magnanimity. A trifle was saved out of the East India shipwreck—and for the rest a few hundreds a year go a long way on foreign soil.

Mrs. Donald, in her new character of countess, recently met Mr. Tiernay again.

"Literature has gone to the dogs in England," he explained, "and I am glad to accept even a beggarly consulship here. Is it to be peace or war between us? I am willing for either; but I give you fair notice, if you mean fight, I can fight."

The lady did not, however, elect to fight, and Mr. Tiernay often attends parties where the quondam Mrs. Donald "improvises" for the benefit of those Italians who profess to understand English. She is no longer pretty, but has a way of being so which will probably stand her in good stead for many a year to come. She is bitter against "companions and elderly simpletons," and when Mr. Tiernay hears her holding forth on this vexed theme, he says *sotto voce*, "Ay, ay, ay."

THE END.



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